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REVEALED
THE 20
GREATEST
HISTORICAL
FILMS

Children of the Blitz

The joys and tragedies
of Britain's evacuees

Inside the Nazi mind

Why did millions embrace
Hitler's ideology?

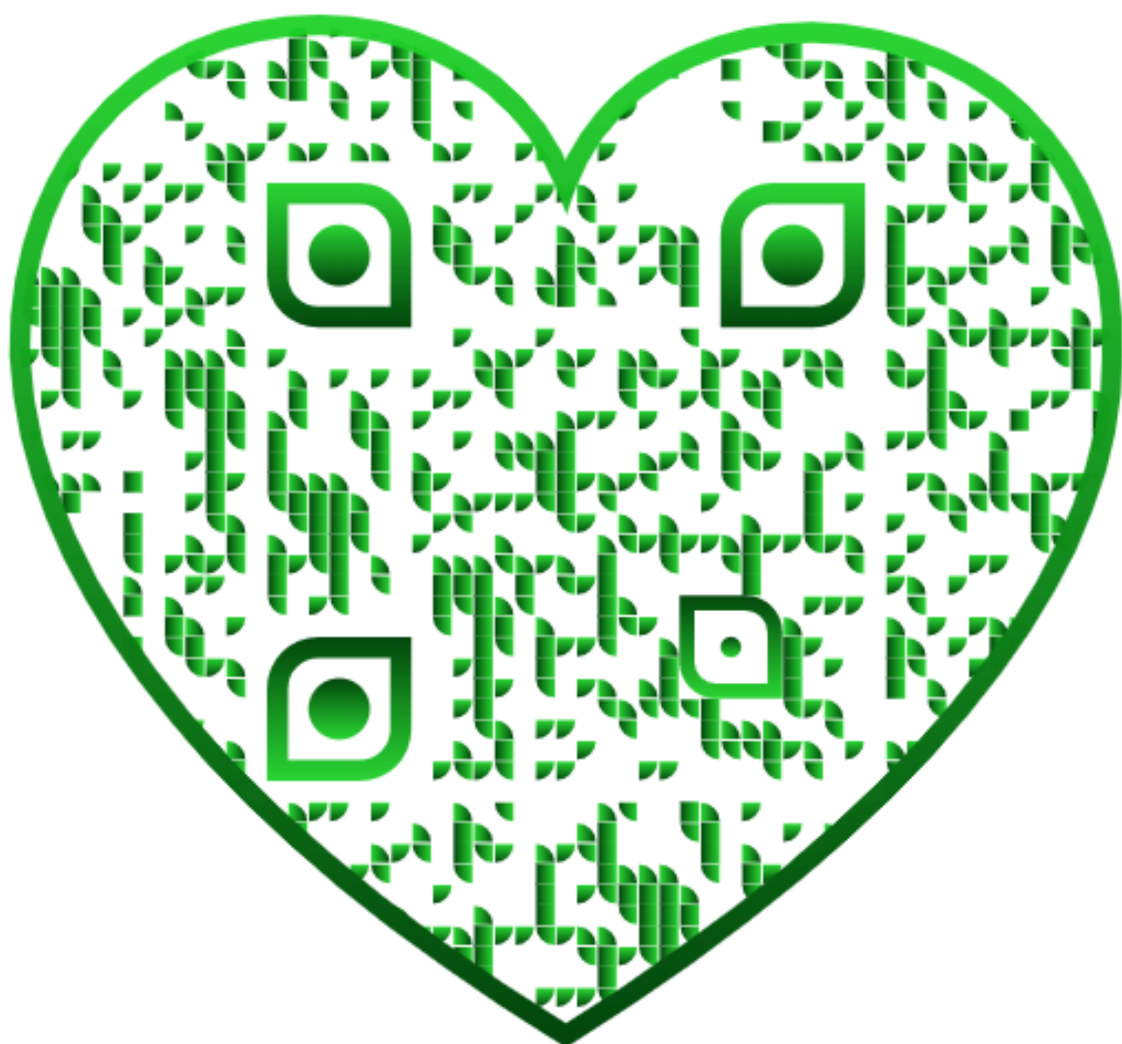
**Fairies, frogs and
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“What is the greatest ever historical film? There is no objectively correct answer to this question, of course, but we thought it would be fun to ask some of our favourite historians to nominate the **100 movies** they rate the most highly. We subsequently polled our website users on this list and in this month’s issue we reveal what you voted as the top 20 (the full list is available on historyextra.com). You can find that on page 11, along with expert analysis by historians Alex von Tunzelmann and Roger Luckhurst. I have no doubt that you will have your own strong views on this, so please do write in with your thoughts.

Historical films are often a gateway to digging deeper into the past and Steve McQueen’s recent *Blitz* will have prompted many viewers to investigate the story of **wartime evacuees**. Well, if you’re one of those – or even if not – then I expect you’ll find much to interest you in Dan Todman’s cover feature (page 22). In his article, Dan offers a rounded picture of the evacuee experience, puncturing some of the stereotypes about this much mythologised story.

Those of you with long enough memories may recall that back in 2015 there was a fair bit of excitement about the 800th anniversary of **Magna Carta**. But might we have been celebrating a decade too early? That’s one conclusion you could draw from David Carpenter’s article this month, where he demonstrates that the **1225 version of the charter** was in many ways more important than the one King John sealed 10 years earlier. Turn to page 46 to find out more.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Another USA

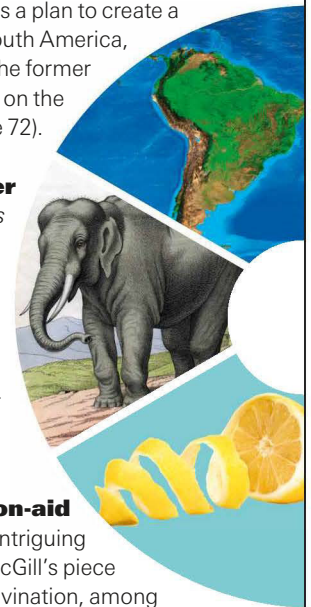
I was fascinated to read, in Tamar Herzog’s review of the new book *Patria*, that in the early 19th century there was a plan to create a united states of South America, encompassing the former Spanish colonies on the continent (page 72).

2. Winter wonder

In this month’s *Anniversaries* entry on the 1814 London frost fair, I was interested to learn that one of the event’s highlights involved an elephant walking across the frozen river (page 7).

3. Lemon-aid

There are so many intriguing details in Martha McGill’s piece on early modern divination, among them the fact that people used to rub lemon peels on their bedposts to determine if they were likely to get married (page 57).



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Corinne Fowler

“In my book, *Our Island Stories*, I took 10 walks through the countryside to discover how local rural lives were affected by colonial activities across the globe.”

Corinne explores the connections between empire and rural labourers **on page 35**



Luke Pepera

“Africans haven’t historically been only the enslaved or the conquered. We’ve been emperors, sculptors, merchants, architects and scholars.”

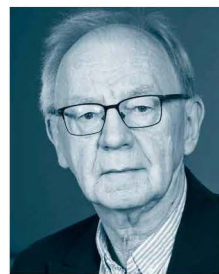
Luke argues that we need fresh perspectives on the history of Africa **on page 60**



Martha McGill

“When researching early modern divination, I was struck by the resourcefulness of magical practitioners. In an uncertain world, they used a bewildering range of methods to reflect on love, war and most things in between.”

Martha describes how people of the past predicted the future **on page 54**



Laurence Rees

“Over time, I began to delve deeper into psychology and neuroscience to better understand mentalities, particularly those of the Nazis.”

Laurence discusses his new examination of the motivations that underpinned the Third Reich **on page 68**

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David Carpenter explains why 1225 rather than 1215 was the crucial year in the establishment of the charter known as the cornerstone of English law

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The only accurate histories of the continent are those that put Africans right at the middle of the story, argues Luke Pepera



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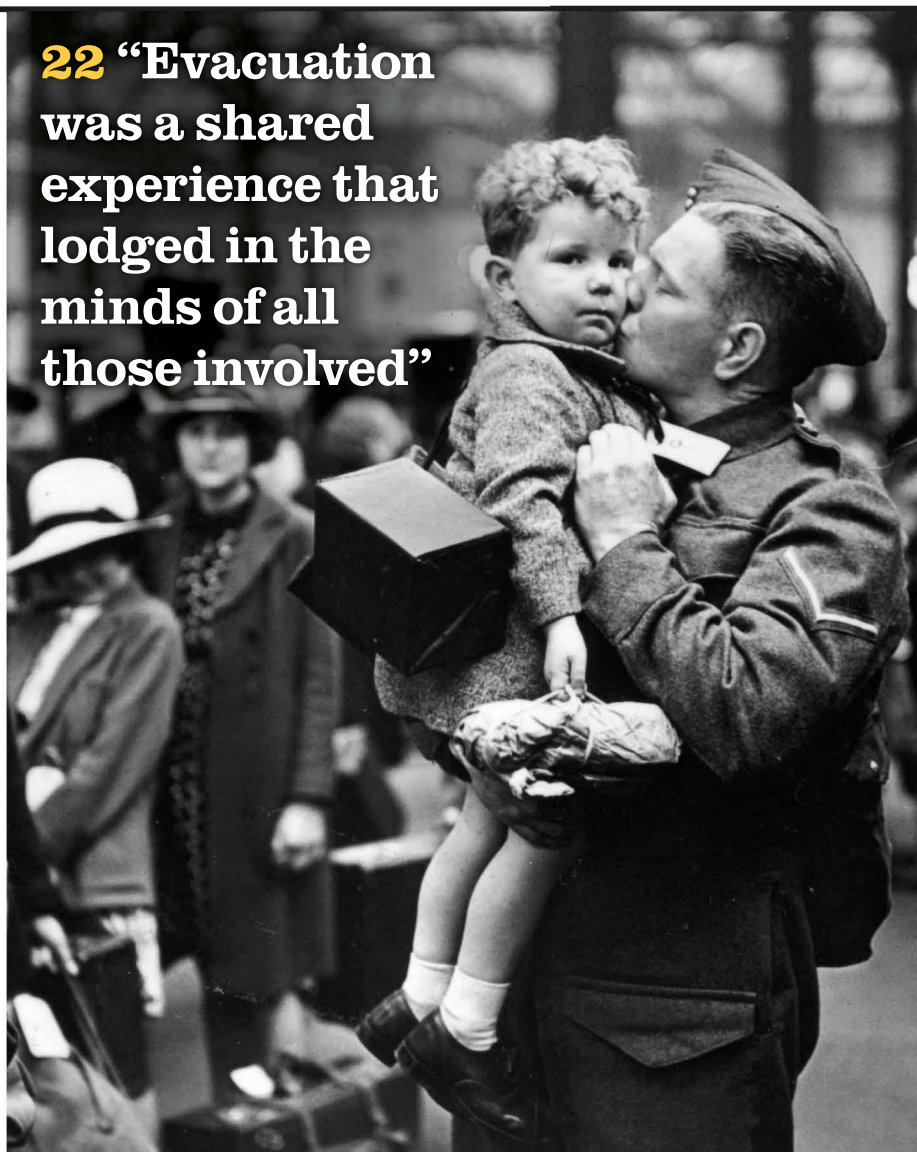
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11

22 “Evacuation was a shared experience that lodged in the minds of all those involved”



60



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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in February in history

14 FEBRUARY 1779

Captain Cook is brutally killed

The intrepid navigator falls foul of his Hawaiian hosts

On Valentine's Day 1779, the pioneering British naval officer James Cook met an untimely end on the shore of Kealahakua Bay, Hawaii.

Cook's fatal sojourn in the archipelago came during his third voyage of exploration, during which he aimed to further chart the Pacific Ocean and find the fabled Northwest Passage around North America. On arrival in January 1779, he had been welcomed as a deity by the Hawaiians, who believed him to be the incarnation of their fertility god, Lono. After a month, though, tensions began to simmer. The British set sail, but a storm forced Cook's ships HMS *Resolution* and *Discovery* to return to Hawaii.

Relations with their hosts turned sour when locals stole a cutter from the *Discovery*. Cook led a party ashore to reclaim the vessel, but the situation swiftly descended into tumult. In a bid to force the return of the stolen boat, Cook attempted to detain King Kalani'ōpu'u. A large crowd gathered, their hostility palpable.

The situation worsened when word spread that a chieftain had been fatally shot nearby. In the ensuing confusion, Cook attempted to retreat – but was stabbed in the shoulder from behind, then clubbed on the head. He collapsed into the shallows, where the bloody assault continued. Four British marines were killed alongside him.

The shock of Cook's death reverberated around the globe, though the facts remained clouded by conflicting accounts. His dismembered remains were later returned to his crew, and were buried at sea.

Cook left an enduring (albeit increasingly controversial) legacy – his maps, discoveries and voyages immortalised in verse, on stage and in the annals of history.

Captain Cook's relationship with Hawaiians, initially cordial, turned sour in 1779

An engraving of 1814 shows revellers crowding onto the frozen Thames during the frost fair that year – the last held in the capital



GETTY IMAGES



Dozens of fireballs flared across the night sky during the so-called Great Meteor Procession of 1913



9 FEBRUARY 1913

A spectacular procession of **meteors streaks across skies above the Americas** as far south as Brazil, with thousands witnessing the dazzling display. Astronomers conclude that the light show was sparked by debris from a small natural satellite that broke up in Earth's atmosphere.

1 FEBRUARY 1814

London holds its last frost fair

Citizens party on the frozen river Thames

In the throes of an icy winter, amid the convulsions of the Napoleonic Wars, London played host to a surreal escape from the worries of European geopolitical turmoil. In the latest iteration of a centuries-old tradition, inhabitants of the English capital celebrated one of its feted frost fairs.

The big freeze had begun in late December 1813. By January, a thick layer of ice had formed right across the river Thames between Blackfriars and London bridges, strong enough to hold thousands of revellers and setting the stage for a bustling carnival. Booths, makeshift pubs and 'fuddling tents' constructed from sails and oars sprang up, enticing punters with roasted oxen, steaming mince pies and potent brews such as 'Purl' – hot gin laced with wormwood wine.

Some of these hostelries adopted witty names; in an apparent dig at the French emperor's disastrous retreat from Russia the previous winter, one was dubbed the City of Moscow. Meanwhile, revellers skated, danced to fiddles and played skittles, while printing presses churned out souvenirs. But it was an elephant's dramatic parade across the ice near Blackfriars Bridge that epitomised the sheer audacity of the fair, which continued for four days.

Newspapers captured the boisterous atmosphere, with the *Sussex Advertiser* describing gambling, "dancing reels" and crowds huddled around "large fires drinking rum, grog, and other spirits". Tea, coffee and "eatables were provided in ample order". Several people fell through the ice's thinner margins, though no deaths were reported.

This was to be the last of several frost fairs recorded in the capital. Rising temperatures, the 1831 demolition of Old London Bridge – the 19 piers of which slowed the river's flow – and the construction of the Thames Embankment made it unlikely that the river would again freeze-over sufficiently to host such an event. This magical wintry spectacle has not been repeated since.



11 FEBRUARY 1990

Nelson Mandela walks out of Victor Verster Prison a free man, after 27 years behind bars. His release marks a major turning point for South Africa, signalling the demise of the nation's racist system of apartheid and its journey towards reconciliation.



Nelson Mandela and his wife, Winnie, celebrate his release from prison in 1990 after 27 years in captivity

A contemporary lithograph depicts the moment at which a violent explosion devastated USS *Maine* in Havana harbour in 1898, precipitating the Spanish-American War later that year

**15 FEBRUARY 1898**

An American battleship explodes off Cuba

The unexplained disaster sparks conflict between Spain and the US

Night lay dark and still in Havana. Then suddenly, at 9.40pm, the peace was shattered when a thunderous explosion tore through the harbour. USS *Maine*, a battleship sent to Cuba to safeguard

American interests, erupted into flames. Within moments, the vessel lay mangled and broken, its forward section obliterated. Steel debris rained down as the inferno bathed the harbour in a hellish glow. The screams of sailors carried across the water as the vessel partially sank beneath the waves. Of 354 men aboard, 266 perished.

The *Maine* had arrived on 25 January 1898, anchoring off Cuba at a moment when the island was in the throes of a bloody uprising by rebels fighting for independence from Spain. Colonial authorities had responded by brutally cracking down on the insurgents and establishing concentration camps, outraging Americans. The conflict also threatened to disrupt Cuba's lucrative sugar trade, which was entwined with US interests.

Under public pressure and amid sensationalist headlines, US President William McKin-

ley dispatched the *Maine* on a "friendly visit", hoping to instil calm in the midst of chaos.

That sangroid curdled with the battleship's destruction. In its place, febrile jingoism swept the US, driven by sensationalist reporting and provocative front pages in titles such as *The New York Journal*. The rallying cry: "Remember the *Maine*! To Hell with Spain!" galvanised public fury, though evidence of Madrid's involvement remained elusive.

A swift naval inquiry concluded that a mine caused the explosion, though the culprit remained unidentified. (Experts have since discounted Spanish sabotage, pointing instead to a coal bunker fire that likely ignited the ship's munitions.) Whatever the truth, the image of the *Maine*'s twisted wreckage proved a powerful *casus belli*.

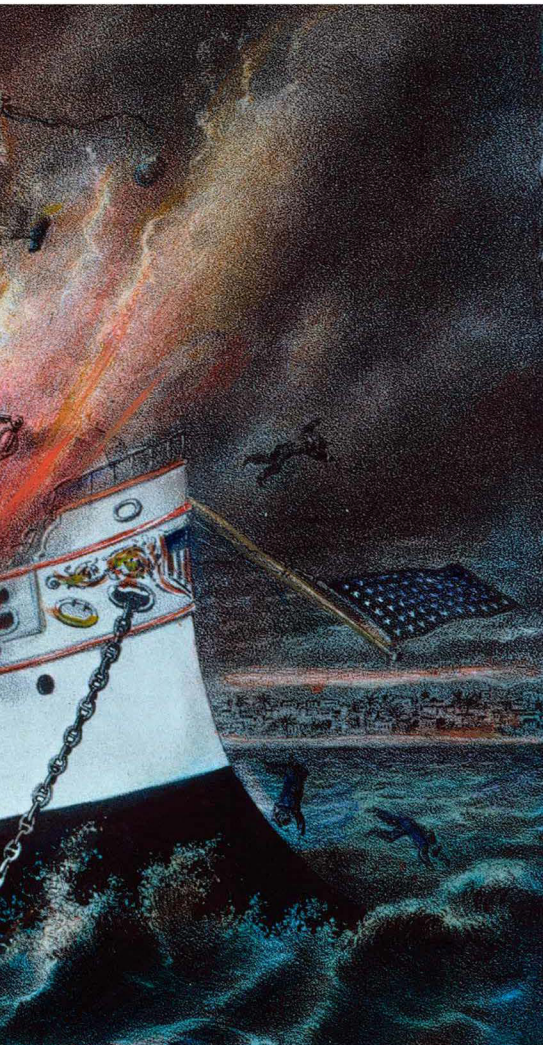
On 25 April, the US declared war on Spain. The Spanish-American War flared from the

A purported death mask of Mary, Queen of Scots, imprinted in wax after her execution and later painted to appear lifelike



8 FEBRUARY 1587

Mary, Queen of Scots is executed by beheading at Fotheringhay Castle, having been found guilty of treason after being involved in a plot to assassinate Queen Elizabeth I. She faces death calmly, clad in a red dress to signify her 'martyrdom'.



Caribbean, where the US seized Puerto Rico, to the western Pacific, where Spanish colonies in the Philippines and Guam were taken. US legislators passed the Teller Amendment, guaranteeing Cuban independence at the conflict's conclusion, but the subsequent Platt Amendment enabled the US to wield significant influence on the island, including the right to intervene and establish a naval foothold at Guantánamo Bay.

Years later, the *Maine's* wreckage was salvaged and its main mast relocated to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia as a tribute to those who had perished on board.

The ship became a symbol of American interventionism, and its fiery end signalled the nation's launch as a global power. Its legacy, both poignant and controversial, endures as a reminder of the perils of unchecked fervour.

GETTY IMAGES



Gutenberg's *Forty-Two-Line Bible*, the first book printed in Europe using movable metal type

23 FEBRUARY 1455

Gutenberg publishes a pioneering new book

The printing press triggers an information revolution

On a February day in 1455, in his modest workshop in the German city of Mainz, Johannes Gutenberg utilised his printing press to produce the first book in Europe using the revolutionary innovation of movable type. More than just a masterpiece of craftsmanship, it sparked an information revolution.

Before Gutenberg's innovation, books were rare treasures – the preserve of the elite – created by scribes who painstakingly transcribed texts onto expensive vellum in a laborious and time-consuming process.

Far to the east, the Chinese had been printing texts since the ninth century, and the Koreans pioneered movable metal type in 1377. However, Gutenberg's invention combined several technological breakthroughs. As well as his own movable metal type, he developed oil-based ink to use with a mechanical winemaking press, and exploited Europe's recent knowledge of paper-making, imported from China via the Islamic world.

The first result of his efforts was the *Forty-Two-Line Bible*, named for its dense, elegant columns. He produced 180 copies – astonishing, at a time when only about 30,000 books existed in Europe. His moulds for casting reusable metal type slashed production times, transforming a months-long process into a task taking mere days.

The impact of this development was amplified by the status of Mainz as a bustling hub of the Holy Roman Empire, with extensive trade networks and scholars. Within decades, printing presses were operating in multiple European cities, fuelling the Renaissance, empowering the Reformation and democratising knowledge.

Gutenberg's invention changed the world – a global transformation comparable to the rise of the internet and the digital revolution. Millions acquired access to ideas thanks to this breakthrough in communication. **H**

Danny Bird is content producer on BBC History Magazine



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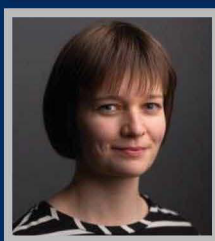
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THE BIG QUESTIONS

What is the greatest historical film?

Sword-and-sandals epic, gritty war drama or muddy medieval caper?

We asked historians to nominate the best historical movies and our website users to vote for their favourites on the list. These are the results...

We asked 22 leading historians to make the case for up to five historical films that they deemed the greatest – with the resulting list of 100 titles depicting a diverse range of periods, places and people. We then asked visitors to our website to vote for their favourites (you can find the full results at historyextra.com/100movies). Here we reveal the top 20...

20 A Knight's Tale

Set in 14th-century England, this 2001 film stars Heath Ledger as William Thatcher, a fictional peasant squire who poses as a knight. It scores poorly on historical accuracy and high on anachronism (medieval crowds sing Queen's 'We Will Rock You', for instance). Yet, via wit and a brilliant cast, it captures the thrill of medieval tournaments, translated effectively for modern audiences.

Alice Loxton, author of *Eighteen: A History of Britain in 18 Young Lives* (Macmillan, 2024)

19 Titanic

There's plenty for history lovers to admire in this 1997 blockbuster, which sets a doomed fictional romance against the tragic sinking of RMS *Titanic* in April 1912. The recreation of the ship was painstaking, while the portrayal of how it sank was based on maritime archaeology at the wreck. It takes creative liberties, but this box-office titan offers visual spectacle and an emotional punch.

Emily Brand, historian and author of *The Fall of the House of Byron* (John Murray, 2020)

18 Hidden Figures

The story of the space race as told from the point of view of its unsung heroes – the African-American women who did much of the maths. This 2016 film takes considerable liberties with the historical source material (it's loosely based on a book of the same name), but nevertheless succeeds in

capturing something of the reality of racial and sexual politics of the US of the 1960s.

Marc Morris, historian and author of books including *The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England* (Hutchinson, 2021)

17 Dunkirk

Christopher Nolan's 2017 epic intertwines numerous fictional narratives to portray the horror of the British evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940. It goes to unusual lengths to recreate a realistic atmosphere, eschewing CGI in favour of location filming, and evokes the lived experience rather than the intricacies of Operation Dynamo. Poignant moments, including the 'little ship' rescues and soldiers walking into the sea, were inspired by historic record and eyewitness testimony. **EB**

16 The Last of the Mohicans

A 1992 classic that may have slipped past younger generations. Set in 1757 during the Seven Years' War, it gets some of its timelines confused, yet still succeeds in explaining the rivalry between the French and the English which led to the destruction and annihilation of so many Native American tribes caught in the middle.

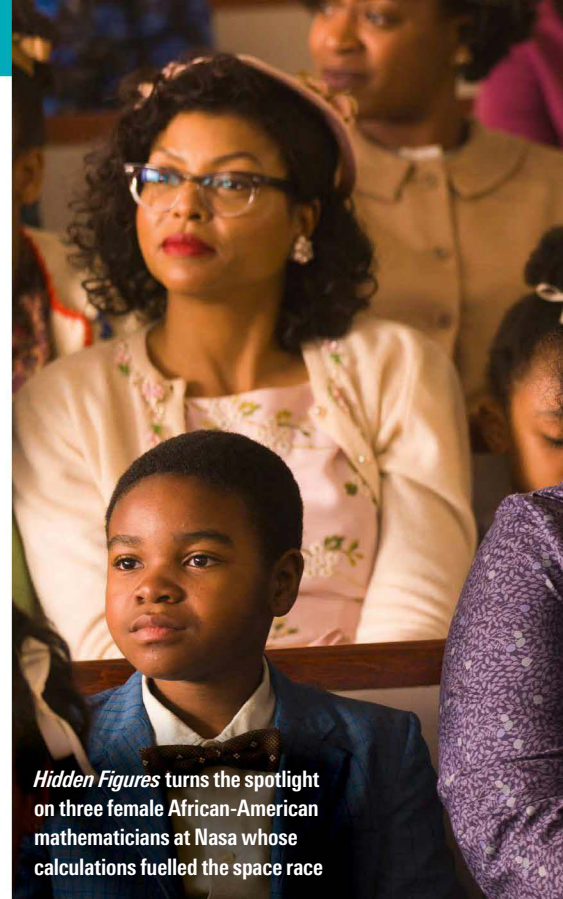
Estelle Paranque, associate professor in early modern history at Northeastern University, London

15 Monty Python and the Holy Grail

As a medievalist, I can't abide most films set in the Middle Ages – but the first original Monty Python film, released in 1975, is a notable exception. No one would argue that it's historically accurate, but it is nevertheless respectful of the Arthurian source material and held together by Graham Chapman's passionate performance as King Arthur. **MM**

14 Doctor Zhivago

Like Boris Pasternak's original novel of 1957, this epic romance, released eight years later,



Hidden Figures turns the spotlight on three female African-American mathematicians at Nasa whose calculations fuelled the space race

is implicitly critical of the early Soviet regime and the popular suffering it caused. It might not score too highly for accuracy among historians of the Russian Revolution, but its tale of decaying ideals and personal sacrifice offers an atmospheric exploration of how grand events impact upon the individual. **EB**

13 Elizabeth

The fact I'm an aficionado of Elizabeth I means that I should hate this 1998 film [starring Cate Blanchett, right, in the title role]. It's riddled with inaccuracies, and leaves the viewer in no doubt that Elizabeth was not a 'Virgin Queen'. And yet it brilliantly evokes the drama, intrigue and sheer treachery of her life, before and after she became monarch.

Tracy Borman, author of books including *Anne Boleyn & Elizabeth I: The Mother and Daughter Who Changed History* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2023)



12 All the President's Men

The Watergate scandal of the 1970s centred on a sprawling, often grubby set of crimes that emanated from US president Richard Nixon's White House and ultimately led to his downfall. The story is told in this 1976 film, however, from the vantage point of the two dogged journalists – Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward – who did so much to expose it. Hence this is not a cynical, sordid political exposé, but instead a tense political thriller



Graham Chapman's King Arthur is a "passionate performance", says Marc Morris



Which films are missing from the list?
Have your say on the top 20, and nominate your favourite historical film, by emailing us at letters@historyextra.com

that has often been imitated in the years since, but seldom matched.
Mark Glancy, professor of film history at Queen Mary University of London

11 Apollo 13

Small inaccuracies aside, 1995's *Apollo 13* succeeds in bringing to life the human side of the 1970 story of this stricken spacecraft – as well as the challenges faced by the crew and the Nasa engineers who came to their rescue. The film reminds us how small we are in the vastness of space, and how success is possible through teamwork and ingenuity.

Zack White, PhD researcher at the University of Southampton and specialist in the Napoleonic era

10 The Lion in Winter

This 1968 Plantagenet Christmas comedy is deliciously vicious, and boasts a jaw-dropping cast: Peter O'Toole is Henry II, Katharine Hepburn is Eleanor of Aquitaine and Anthony Hopkins (in his breakthrough role) is Richard the Lionheart. James Goldman's script, adapted from his play, captures the high stakes of the era's royal feuds. "What shall we hang?" Henry asks Eleanor. "The holly, or each other?"

Alex von Tunzelmann, historian, podcaster and screenwriter

9 Das Boot

Adapted from the novel by German author and journalist Lothar-Günther Buchheim – who had served aboard U-96 in 1941 – and with numerous veterans as consultants,

1981's *Das Boot* is the definitive film depiction of Germany's U-boat war.

Telling the story of one of U-96's 11 war patrols, it shows the boredom, drama and camaraderie of the battle of the Atlantic, as well as the mental and physical toll endured by U-boat crews. Gritty, claustrophobic and utterly compelling, it is essential viewing for every history buff.

Roger Moorhouse, historian and author of books including *The Devils' Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939–1941* (Bodley Head, 2014)

8 The King's Speech

Set in the late 1930s, this 2010 drama follows the surprisingly intimate relationship between the Duke of York – the future King George VI – and an Australian speech

therapist, Lionel Logue. As they work to overcome the duke's stammer, a succession of dramatic events unfold: an abdication crisis, a coronation and the onset of war.

Though scoring high on historic accuracy, the film occasionally deviates. For example, Logue's therapy work appears to last just months – in reality, it began in October 1926, a decade before the abdication crisis. **AL**

7 A Man for All Seasons

A masterful 1966 representation of an episode of British history that still impacts us today, as Sir Thomas More (Paul Scofield) stands firm in the face of Henry VIII's desire for divorce and a schism with Rome.

More's world is visceral, from draughty corridors to muddy riverbanks. The danger and turmoil of the period is vividly evoked: More appreciates that a misspoken word will cost him his life, but that his silence might well, too. Ultimately, the film reminds us that the men arguing issues of political and religious truth believed the ultimate price might be the eternal damnation of their soul. The executioner's axe was nothing compared to what was really at stake.

Mary-Ann Ochota, broadcaster and specialist in anthropology, archaeology and social history

6 Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World

This 2003 film is alive with the realities of life at sea in the Napoleonic Wars, following the exploits of Captain Jack Aubrey, Dr Stephen Maturin and the crew of HMS *Surprise*.

Patrick O'Brian's original books are a bit too long and meticulous for my taste, but the historical detail here – from food to naval tactics – feels so vivid and immersive that you'll taste the salt. It's also a sobering reminder of the futility and heroism of war, and the fact that not long ago life was nasty, brutish and short for many. **MO**



Colin Firth stars as King George VI, who overcomes his stammer in *The King's Speech*



"*Schindler's List* is an important film, perhaps even *the* most important film," says Nathen Amin – and respondents agreed, voting it number one

5 Saving Private Ryan

One of the most famous and commercially successful films of all time, Steven Spielberg's Second World War drama is worth your time for its opening scene alone – the landings on Omaha beach.

What follows is essentially a quest movie, with Tom Hanks wonderfully vulnerable as Captain Miller, leading his squad in their efforts to find and repatriate Matt Damon's title character. Stunningly realised, emotionally profound and shot through with standout performances, 1998's *Saving Private Ryan* is simply one of the best war films ever brought to the screen. **RM**

4 Zulu

To watch and understand 1964's *Zulu* is in some measure to understand Britain, its colonial history and its historical view of not just Africans but its 'colonial subjects' generally.

The film tells the story of the 1879 battle of Rorke's Drift, fought between around 150 British soldiers and more than 3,000 Zulu warriors. Michael Caine's performance as the supercilious Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead is the most emblematic of what is believed to have been Britons' attitude towards Africans, and therefore the most memorable.

It's epic, dramatic and enlightening, with some of the best battle-scene setpieces in all

of cinema. But the entire film is told from the British perspective; that of the Zulu, which would improve the film's accuracy, is lacking.

Luke Pepera, author of *Motherland: A Journey through 500,000 Years of African Culture and Identity* (W&N, 2025). You can read his feature on page 60

3 Lawrence of Arabia

Historians may quibble with some of the fictionalisations in David Lean's 1962 desert epic, and the family of the Sheikh Auda Abu Tayeh protested about his racially insensitive portrayal by Anthony Quinn. Yet *Lawrence of Arabia* remains one of the most visually stunning films ever made, with a gorgeous soundtrack and powerfully compelling chemistry between Peter O'Toole as Lawrence and Omar Sharif as the fictional Sherif Ali. For all its inaccuracies, it captures a truth about Lawrence's character and charisma that scholarly biographies don't always convey. **AVT**

2 Gladiator

Are you not entertained? Yes, yes I was, and so were millions around the globe. The very embodiment of a historical epic, 2000's *Gladiator* is Oscar-winning storytelling at its finest. Russell Crowe's intense Maximus (pictured above right) carries the viewer on an explosive journey through ancient Rome,

soundtracked throughout by a rousing musical score. Historical truth may be an afterthought and the script a tad unsophisticated, but this is an exhilarating, emotional experience – and its legacy continues to echo through eternity.

Nathen Amin, author of books including *Son of Prophecy: The Rise of Henry Tudor* (Amberley, 2024)

1 Schindler's List

Haunting viewing that captures, as well as any film can, the absolute terror of Nazi Germany and the unspeakable suffering of the Jewish community.

Schindler's List is an important film, perhaps even *the* most important film. With a world so often in turmoil, Steven Spielberg's emotive 1993 masterclass directly challenges the viewer and reminds us of the danger of allowing evil to take root.

The liquidation of the ghetto, in particular, is uncomfortable viewing – as it should be. The further removed from the Holocaust we are in historical terms, the more necessary this film becomes. **NA H**





JoJo Rabbit is very much in the tradition of Jewish storytelling, while *Shoah* (left) is "one of the most important works about the Holocaust"

ANALYSIS

"It's interesting that Spielberg's film is the one that has come to be seen as the big, serious take on the Holocaust"

What did experts make of the results from our greatest historical films poll? **ROGER LUCKHURST** and **ALEX VON TUNZELMANN** spoke to Kev Lochun about their thoughts on the winner – and what's missing from the list

Were you surprised that *Schindler's List* was voted the best historical film?

Roger Luckhurst I have no problem with it being in first place – it's a really interesting result. Yet, as a historian, I'd prefer that it featured alongside other representations of the Holocaust and other ways of dealing with that history. When the film was released back in 1993, there was a huge amount of controversy about whether Spielberg had overstepped the mark with his representation of the concentration camps. You can reasonably argue that you shouldn't try to fictionalise anything from that historical moment.

[French film-maker] Claude Lanzmann, who directed the nine-hour 1985 documentary *Shoah*, despised it for its fictionalisations. I think his film is one of the most important works about the Holocaust, and should perhaps be watched alongside *Schindler's List* to foreground the challenges of turning these events into a narrative.

Alex von Tunzelmann It's one of the most heartbreaking instances of historical fictionalisation on this list. People clearly haven't chosen it because they think, 'oh, I'd like to watch that tonight'. And that does make me wonder about the criteria people use to choose their top historical films: *Schindler's List* is incredibly well made, and the quality of the performances is very high. Yet I think some people pick it primarily because of how it's seen: as an important film that says something about how we should approach the Holocaust.

That's an issue that's still very open for debate. If you look at more contemporary cultural representations of the Holocaust by survivors or Jewish people – *Superman* or *Captain America* [comic books], for instance – you find a far more diverse range of viewpoints about combating tyranny. So it's interesting that Spielberg's film is the one that's stuck in people's minds as the big, serious take on the subject.

RL It's not unfair to see *Schindler's List* as a very conventional Hollywood melodrama. And in a sense, that means that what else Spielberg did in the process of making the film – capturing real-life Holocaust testimony for museums, for instance – is almost as important as the film itself as a way of asking people to think about difficult issues.

AVT There are lots of different ways to approach enormous, traumatic historical events such as the Holocaust, and recent years have seen a range of alternative responses. Taika Waititi's [2019 satirical drama] *JoJo Rabbit* didn't make this list, and proved divisive, but it was very much in the tradition of Jewish traditions of storytelling about the Holocaust – books such as Philip Roth's [1979 novel] *The Ghost Writer*, for instance.

Something that struck me about the top 10 is how full it is of depictions of war and heroism. Why do you think certain films, and certain genres, have such an impact on the popular imagination?

AVT It's very blokey, isn't it? I nominated *Lawrence of Arabia*, for instance, and I'm very happy to see it in the top 10. But that film features no female speaking roles – quite deliberately and appropriately, given its subject matter. *Zulu* features almost no women: I nearly nominated that, too, because it's fantastically interesting, so I'm pleased to see that somebody else did.

So although the full list includes titles that offer different perspectives, most of the films in the top 10 are very male and have a very male point of view. That's a view of history that plenty of historians have challenged across the past 50 years. It's not exactly revolutionary now to say that women were a part of history – and yet this doesn't seem to have filtered down to these selections. Obviously, one could

argue that sexism *did* exist historically, and that as such it's not surprising that lots of these films are about men. On the other hand, I do think historical films tell us an awful lot about how we see and use history today – so the fact the top 10 celebrates men so extensively does tell us something.

RL I totally agree – and the kinds of films that are made and the stories they tell have been changing recently, too. The Kate Winslet-starring 2024 film *Lee*, for instance – about Second World War photo-journalist Lee Miller – emphasises the centrality of her war photography and the difficulty she faced in trying to persuade people of her abilities. So there are new and more diverse narratives coming through.

Alex, you were among the historians who nominated films for this list – but Roger, you're coming to it fresh. Did any of the choices in the final 100 particularly surprise either of you?

RL One of the great things about this kind of list is to discover the results that outrage you! I was reading the top 100 [available on *historyextra.com*] and thinking, 'well that's not a historical film', and realised I have a strong definition of what a 'historical film' is. In my view, 1944's *Henry V* [49 on the list] isn't a historical film about Henry V – it's an adaptation of a Shakespeare play. So I was increasingly entertained by my own prejudices as the list went on.

AVT I had the same response. To me, Ang Lee's 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* [at number 32] isn't a historical film – it's an adaptation of a Jane Austen novel, set in the period in which it was written. In my view, for something to qualify as a historical film, it has to either include real historical characters or take place in a distinct historical setting.

Yet Alex, you chose one of the list's most unusual entries – [1989 sci-fi comedy] *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (left).

What's your argument for why that qualifies?

AVT Well, several real historical characters are depicted in that film – and some of them in their contemporary time periods, too! If you've not seen it, its premise is that two high-school students

– tasked with completing a history project and equipped with a time machine – travel to various historical eras to collect figures including Napoleon, Socrates and Abraham Lincoln.

My point about that film is that it engages incredibly well with what we call 'historical reception': how we understand and use history in the present day. Does it tell you much about Abraham Lincoln? Not really – but it *does* tell you quite a lot about his cultural place and the way he was thought about in the US of the late 1980s.

RL I agree entirely. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* is great at both giving us a sense of how school teaching often uses the 'great man theory' of history, and for fantastically subverting it through its title characters, who are complete airheads. It's brilliant.

Roger, are there any major omissions from the list that you'd particularly like to argue the case for?

RL I'm really surprised that DW Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* [about the American Civil War and its aftermath] is not on this list. In fact, I'd probably put it at number one, because it was so influential, and is probably why we're still making historical films today. It's also problematic: it features a scene in which a white actor wearing blackface menaces and rapes a white woman, for instance, before the Ku Klux Klan rides to the rescue. Indeed, the film was responsible for the KKK's reinvention in the 1920s, when it reached its peak. But it's a hugely important film – even if you hate its content.

Finally, how important do you think films such as these are as a gateway for people to get into history?

AVT Rather than stressing about the kinds of things historians worry about – accuracy or potential for misrepresentation, for

example – what we find is that people who watch historical dramas, comedies, or even fantasies, actually tend to continue their interest in history. Indeed, after somebody watches a historical film, you often find that they'll go and do some online research about it.

I have to admit that a big part of the reason I'm a historian is because I was completely obsessed with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as a kid and wanted to be an archaeologist, which turned into becoming a historian. So the fact that the kind of films on this list can be so influential is a hugely positive force.

RL Films offer a really useful way of thinking about history: even very mainstream releases can tell us interesting things about shifting perspectives on the past. To cite just one recent example, Steve McQueen's latest film, last year's *Blitz*, centres on a young mixed-race boy who runs back from being evacuated and into the London Blitz. The encounters he then has are so striking and diverse, and reveal a lot about London in the period that has not traditionally been included in familiar historical narratives. And that's what films can do: offer us fantastically compelling stories, and at the same time reveal the ways in which history itself is changing. **H**



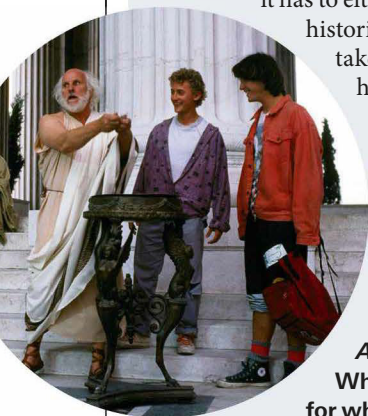
Roger Luckhurst is Geoffrey Tillotson chair of 19th-century Studies at Birkbeck University of London. He specialises in film and cultural history, and his books include *Gothic: An Illustrated History* (Thames & Hudson, 2021)



Alex von Tunzelmann is a historian, screenwriter and author, whose books include *Fallen Idols: 12 Statues That Made History* (Headline, 2021)



The Birth of a Nation, the 1915 epic about the US Civil War, is, argues Roger Luckhurst, "a hugely influential film"





// Nothing matches being with Alexander the Great on foot in the Hindu Kush //

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His latest book is *In the Footsteps of Du Fu* (Simon & Schuster, 2023). You'll find him on X at [MichaelWoodMV](#)

B B C

AT OUR LITTLE FILM COMPANY, MAYA VISION, we recently took the decision to digitise all of the rushes of our key films so that we could dispose of hundreds of boxes of tapes that had been kept in storage, throwing out stuff we thought we would never need again. There were even cans of 16mm film that we can't even play anymore, having given our Steenbeck flatbed editing suite to a film school years ago. We've been making films for 40 years so, unsurprisingly, looking through all of that material over the past few weeks, the office became a kind of memory room.

I have always been a great believer in filming on location: where things actually happened in history really matters. Nothing quite matches being with Alexander the Great on foot in the Hindu Kush – hot, sweet black tea and coarse, bitter bread in the early morning light, shared with Northern Alliance gunmen. Or visiting Tsaparang in Tibet, frozen in time at the moment of the sack of 1693, the dead still lying in tattered clothes in their caves. Or watching dawn break over the festival of Qoyllur Rit'i at 5,000 metres in the Peruvian Andes, long congas of dancers snaking down from the night rituals at the glacier.

Even in the UK, there were moments made timeless by location. Here was footage of the last glover working by hand in Worcestershire only 25 years ago; and of the last wool staple (trading centre) in Britain – at Thame, Oxfordshire – which has closed since we made our films on Shakespeare, whose father was a glover and wool brogger (middleman). The fabric of time, indeed.

In history, for me, the living connection really adds substance to the whole thing, if you make the effort to seek it out. Our journey to the Lost City of the Incas, Espiritu Pampa (or Vilcabamba) in the Peruvian jungle, for example, involved a three-day march on foot with pack animals carrying the camera gear – and all for a single extended travel sequence, dramatic though it was. There we enjoyed the unforgettable experience of camping out under the forest canopy amid the cries of scarlet macaws, alongside the overgrown platforms of the last Inca city to fall to the Spanish in 1572.

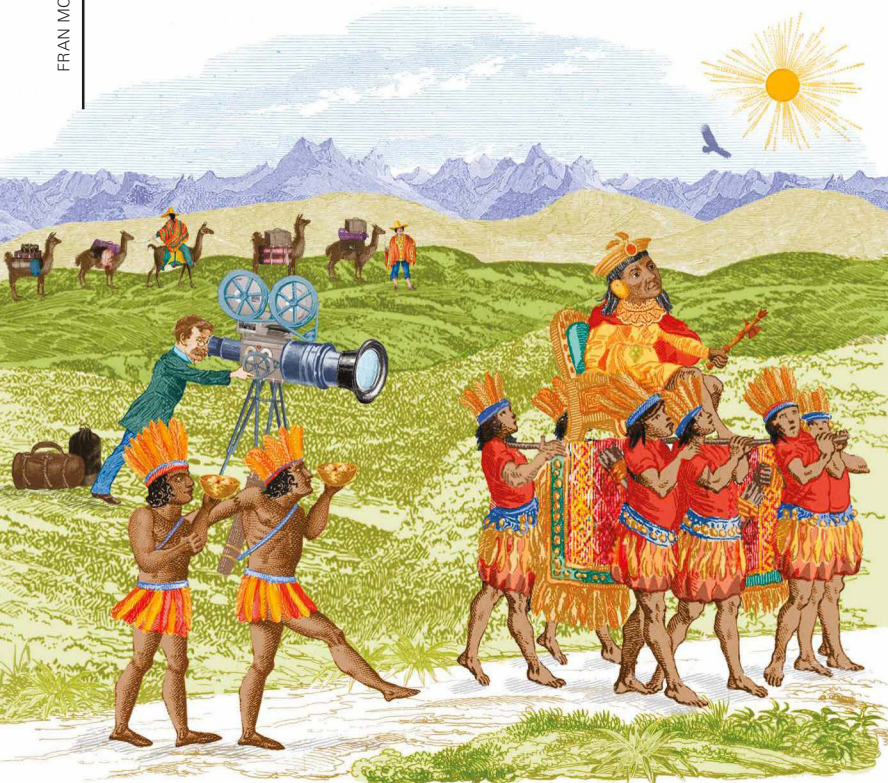
While sifting through the rushes, we often stumbled on sequences that never made the shows as broadcast. A memorable example was filmed outside the Inca capital, Cusco. Here, in Inca times, invisible sacred lines extended out into the hills in the direction of each of the four quarters, linking ancient shrines or *huacas* – stones, rocks, caves, springs. After the conquest, the Spanish were anxious to suppress local cults and destroy the indigenous people's allegiance to their old world and its religion, but the sites survived into the 21st century – only a short physical distance, but a world away in mentalities, from the tourist shops and bars in Cusco.

One was a sacred spring at a country house in which was kept the mummified body of the wife of the great Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui (ruled 1438–71) – a place, then, intimately associated with memories of the height of the Inca empire. To our surprise, the house was still standing. Behind the crumbling façade of the later hacienda were characteristic trapezoidal stone doors of the Inca imperial period. The estate had been abandoned and the house boarded up but, at the back of the garden, the primordial Inca shrine still stood – a simple great rock with a later Spanish chapel perched on top. At the base of the rock was a cave from which a sacred spring bubbled. By the entrance we spotted fresh fire marks, ashes, broken sea shells, an empty liquor bottle and matches. Someone still cared.

Contacts in Cusco helped me find the family who owned it up to the 1920s. Engineer Abraham Salcedo Mayta lived in a little house in a *barrio* (district) near the airport. He was a small, bright, alert man with dark, leathery skin, having something of the look of a Chinese emperor about him. And he was indeed an emperor: "I am descended on my mother's side from the Inca Mayta Capac," he said. "Huayna Capac was of the same lineage." (Huayna Capac was the last great Inca who fatefully died in the great plague shortly before Francisco Pizarro's conquest.)

Abraham Mayta sadly never made the final cut, so packed with revelations was the Peruvian film in our 2000 series *Conquistadors* – which I still regard as our most electrifying – but the footage has all been saved.

And what of the future? You never know. Here's to further travels in time! **H**

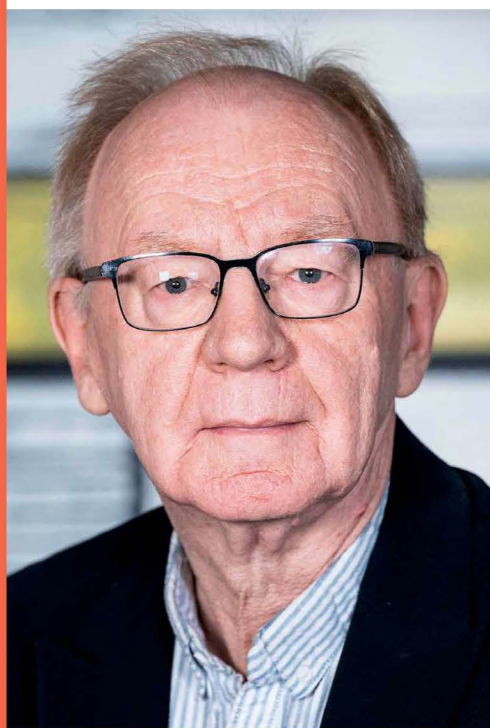


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HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the end of the Assad regime in Syria

// After the end of a brutal dictatorship, trauma can take generations to heal //

MAZEN AL-HAMADA WAS A SYMBOL FOR THE tens of thousands who were brutally tortured, raped and killed during the regime of the former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Detained and abused following the 2011 uprising against that dictator, al-Hamada was released in 2013 and granted asylum in the Netherlands a year later. He travelled around western countries, filling lecture halls and telling lawmakers about the unbearable things that had happened to him in prison. He bore witness, hoping for action – but also so no one could say they did not know.

When he took part in the documentary *Syria's Disappeared: The Case Against Assad*, which was broadcast on Channel 4 in 2017, its director Sara Afshar asked how al-Hamada felt about the people who tortured him. At first he could not speak, swallowing his tears. "The law will hold them to account," he said, eventually. "I will not rest until I take them to court and get justice – justice for me and my friends who they killed. Even if it costs my life."

In a decision that terrified his friends, he returned to Damascus in 2020 – and quickly disappeared. In December 2024, following Assad's fall, his body was discovered by rebel forces in the morgue of the notorious Sednaya Prison. It appeared that he had been killed just before the jail was liberated.

Will there be justice? Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani), leader of Islamist militant group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, has said that no one should fear for their future unless they have blood on their hands. It's too early to know exactly what that means for justice.

History shows that, after initial scenes of jubilation at the end of a brutal dictatorship or civil war, the horrors committed are soon revealed – and the resulting trauma can take many generations to heal. Recent examples include Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and Libya following the end of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

The path to justice for victims is rarely clear. After the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the wars in the former Yugoslavia (1991–2001), the United Nations set up tribunals at which victims could share the horrors they witnessed and experienced, and to try those suspected of bearing the greatest responsibility for atrocities – including, in some cases, for genocide. Though senior figures were convicted, deep divisions still endure in those societies.

At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in post-apartheid South Africa, people shared their painful stories of racial discrimination; those who came forward to speak truth received legal immunity. The accounting was incomplete and often political, but there was also an effort to allow victims to express their trauma.

That never happened in Northern Ireland after the Troubles ended with the Good Friday Agreement – effectively a stalemate – though changes were enacted: the Royal Ulster Constabulary was rebranded as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, for example. And in the case of the dictatorships of General Francisco Franco in Spain and General Augusto Pinochet in Chile, blanket amnesties were issued, so there were few national discussions about commemorating or acknowledging crimes, let alone prosecuting those who committed them.

How a war ends, who the victors are and who backs the new rulers are factors that often determine what happens next. These are early days for Syria after Assad, but the trauma of the past 13 years of civil war – the torture, the killings, the millions displaced – and how that plays out in terms of retribution will be a significant factor in the ongoing stability of the country.

When they write of recent events and dissect what went wrong at the political level, future historians should also remember the stories of the people who lived through this period: those held in the prisons, forced to flee and who dared to resist. That includes Mazen al-Hamada, who did not live to see the day when Assad was gone, nor to fight for the justice he so desperately wanted – for himself and for the hundreds of thousands who were killed and tortured in Syria. **H**

Mourners hold a photo of activist Mazen al-Hamada at his funeral on 12 December 2024. It's thought that he died in the infamous Sednaya Prison shortly before the fall of Syria's brutal Assad regime

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine. She is also author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Waste not, want not

In spite of what my grandchildren suggest, I was not born in the medieval period (I am only 88). However, I was surprised to find that many of the things discussed in the article on disposing of waste in the medieval period (Q&A, Christmas) were things I recognise from my childhood.

It was wartime (and its immediate aftermath), and most food, clothing and sweets were rationed. That meant there was little chance of squandering anything. But we also had a rag and bone man visiting regularly, a man visited now and then to sharpen and repair knives, and mending clothes was standard whenever possible.

My mother and sisters also made a lot of clothes, while I soon learned how to remove a worn-out sole from a shoe, cut a new piece of leather to size and nail it on, ensuring the nails did not find their way inside the shoe. If a hammer lost its handle we would make a new one. Lots of people had a shed with a range of tools for this purpose.

We had no supermarkets and most shops were within walking distance. As we had no fridges, we bought food when we needed it and threw little away.

There was a 'pig-bin' serving about 20 houses, which handled all the waste food we did have.

This was collected once a week.

In short, like our medieval ancestors, we knew how to deal with waste.

John Page,
Somerset



A woman repairs her husband's clothes in the 1940s. Reader John Page writes that waste was kept to a minimum in wartime



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Patria: Lost Countries of South America** by Laurence Blair. Read our review on page 72

Ruthless Richard III

I read with great interest your piece titled *Have We Finally Unmasked the Killer of the Princes in the Tower?* (January). As one with a vested interest in discovering the truth of what happened to the princes, I found the views of Tracy Borman and Tim Thornton to be extremely credible, as opposed to the conclusions reached by Philippa Langley and Rob Rinder in a recent TV programme. It is clear to most historians that Richard III was as ruthless as any in that period of history.

As a descendant of Sir George de Neville, the brother of Cecily de Neville who was my 15th great aunt and mother of Richard III and Edward IV, the princes in the Tower are my cousins. I feel entitled to air my opinion that I believe Richard III, my first cousin 14 times removed, was indeed guilty according to the evidence so far disclosed.

From what I understand, His Majesty King Charles has no objection to the bones of two boys found in the Tower, now in Westminster Abbey, being re-examined and their DNA being revealed. Can we not at last bring a conclusion to this ongoing saga?

Dr Robert Tansey, Nottinghamshire

Chain of evidence

Professor Tim Thornton is to be commended for his painstaking research into the fate of Edward V and his brother Richard. Finding a reference to Edward's gold chain in the will of Sir James Tyrrell's sister-in-law is astounding, but is it evidence Tyrrell organised the death of the young princes? When they were declared illegitimate, would they not have been deprived of any marks of royalty, such as the chain?

If Richard III somehow spirited them away to safety (as has been suggested by Philippa Langley), he would hardly have given the chain back to Edward. But I agree that the new evidence is not looking good for Richard III.

Fen Flack, Bewdley

The survivor's story?

The will of Lady Margaret Capell may be compelling in deciding that Richard III murdered the princes. But, equally, a recent TV programme from other experts highlighted other documents suggesting that the princes survived the Tower. With forensics today, we could perhaps determine whether the bones found in the Tower are in fact the princes, but that would still not really prove who was responsible.

Any records held in England from that time will always be in favour of the Tudors,



who held power over life and death in a very real way.

Mary Coburn, Surrey

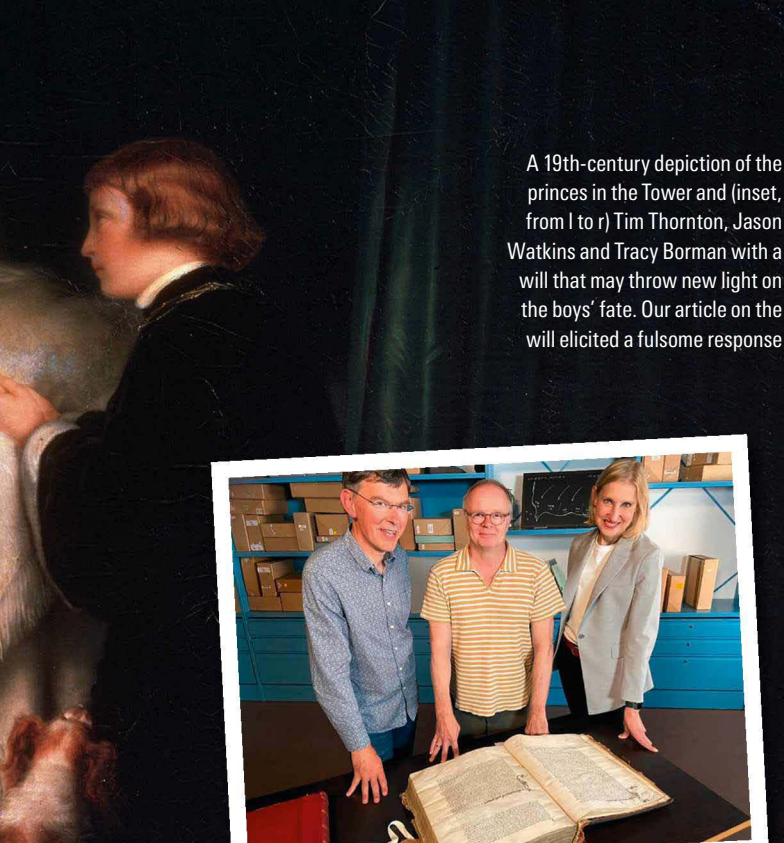
Did Jesus reject sex?

Diarmaid MacCulloch's article *Why Sex Was a Sin* (Christmas) begins with the statement that celibacy barely merits a mention in the Bible, and then the claim that Christianity has always been a religion of family values. I believe that Professor MacCulloch has not paid due heed to the celibacy of both Jesus and St Paul, both as exemplars of the single state and in their teaching.



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➤ Page 52



A 19th-century depiction of the princes in the Tower and (inset, from l to r) Tim Thornton, Jason Watkins and Tracy Borman with a will that may throw new light on the boys' fate. Our article on the will elicited a fulsome response



In Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 12, verse 50), Jesus's sense of family is radically different. He states: "For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Meanwhile, in his First Letter to the Corinthians (Chapter 7, verse 8), St Paul writes, in the light of his belief in the imminent return of Jesus: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am."

Canon Charles Chadwick, Witney

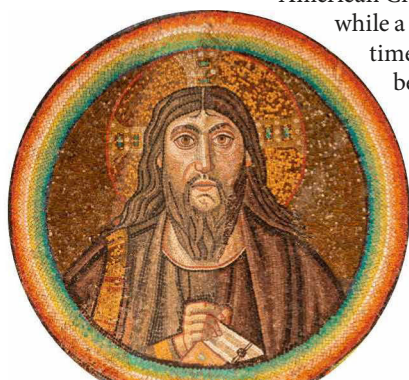
My connection to the French Revolution... and the US Civil War

I write in reference to your *Conversation* piece (January) about what sparked people's love of history. Having been born in south-east London just after the war, I was surrounded by the effects of the conflict. The air raid siren still stood at the end of our road, as children we played in the abandoned anti-aircraft gun emplacement on the nearby heath, and bomb sites abounded. My parents had survived two world wars, and the Great Depression, and told me of their experiences, while most adults I knew had served in the armed forces.

As a child I met a distant relative, a centenarian, who had been born before the American Civil War, and I later realised that, while a youngster, she lived at the same time as people who had been alive before the French Revolution.

All this brought home to me how personal history is and inspired in me a love of reading about the past, which has never left me.

Colin Bullen, Kent



Jesus, pictured in a sixth-century mosaic, was regarded as an exemplar of celibacy, writes reader Canon Charles Chadwick

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"I FELT VERY ALONE IN A WORLD GONE HORRIBLY MAD"

It was a moment of possibilities, dislocation – and dread.

Dan Todman tells the story of the 1.5 million urban Britons evacuated to the countryside at the start of the Second World War





Evacuees leave Myrdle Street Central School in Whitechapel, east London, on 1 September 1939, carrying gas masks. More than 1.5 million people were moved from urban to rural areas in just a few days

MW D 1939A

It's October 1939, and an aristocratic couple are discussing how to manage the horde of ill-spoken, slovenly evacuees from the city who have been billeted in their house. Not to worry, the

husband tells his wife: bringing the children into a more refined environment will soon civilise the youngsters. Instead, as the sketch plays out on the BBC Home Service, the couple's lordly airs and graces disappear. It's the evacuees – sent away from home at the behest of the authorities – who change their hosts, rather than the other way around.

It's a skit that fits with how the story of Second World War evacuation has often been constructed, both at the time and in the years since. Here is a narrative that emphasises a clash of cultures: the rural rich suddenly confronted by the urban poor – a moment replete with topsy-turvy possibilities. But the circumstances around the recording of the sketch itself reveal how evacuation was a much larger and more complex event than this straightforward narrative suggests.

It was performed by a cast of variety performers who had also been evacuated, from London to Bristol. That move was part of the BBC's own preparations to maintain a schedule of light entertainment to intersperse with the news bulletins and government announcements expected to dominate the airwaves over the first weeks of the war.

Seen in this light, the first wave of evacuations was specifically a product of conditions in the autumn of 1939 – but it was also an event that came to have a deep significance in the British folk memory, emblematic of the longer and wider disruptions, separations and anxieties experienced by so many civilians.

It was, too, part of a global phenomenon, as states and communities sought to move people out of harm's way. Thinking about evacuation therefore helps us understand not only Britain's war, but also a wider human experience – national and local differences notwithstanding – of the impact of mechanised conflict.

Pre-emptive action

In Britain, three types of evacuation were undertaken: official, organisational and private. Official schemes evacuated children, mothers with infants, pregnant women and disabled adults from cities to locations in the surrounding countryside – so-called 'reception areas'. These were set in motion on 1 September, once war was imminent but before it had been declared. More of these evacuees came from London than any other single city but, with the exception of Northern Ireland (where evacuation didn't start

until 1940), this was a nationwide phenomenon. In total, more children were evacuated from other conurbations including Greater Manchester, Tyneside and Merseyside, than from the capital.

Schemes were set up to relocate important parts of the state machinery that would run the war, too. The Air Ministry was later sent to Harrogate, the Admiralty to Bath and a new Ministry of Food was based in Colwyn Bay. At the same time, the BBC wasn't the only organisation that evacuated its staff. Others, including banks, galleries and universities, moved part of or all their operations away from big cities.

Meanwhile, many private citizens with the means to do so took it upon themselves to head to the homes of rural relatives or seaside resort hotels. In those first days of September 1939, as many as 3.5 million Britons may have been in transit by train, boat, coach or car. Being evacuated, as well as seeing evacuees depart, travel or arrive, were shared common experiences that lodged in the memories of those involved.

As evacuee Donald Wharf recalled: "I will never forget standing, dazed and bemused, on the forecourt of Paddington Station... I also felt very alone in a world gone horribly mad. That was, of course, in spite of the fact that the station was virtually full, mostly with East End evacuees with labels and gas masks like me. But that was the way I felt at the time – maybe some others did too – while lots, who were similar in age to me, just put down their boxes and cried."

Anticipating attacks

The rationale for these relocations was simple. There was a widespread expectation that any new conflict might start with a devastating air attack by enemy bombers. Such a raid would inflict all the horrors of the front-line trenches of the First World War – not just high explosives and slicing shards of metal but also choking and blinding gas – on civilian populations. The best way to protect vulnerable people and essential services was to move them out of danger.

Such fears substantially overestimated the power of combatant air forces at the outset of the war, but it was the perception of risk that mattered. Had anything close to the worst-case predictions come to pass in Britain, the impact would have been so awful that it might have broken the country's will to carry on.

Local authorities were responsible for planning official schemes for evacuating children, some mothers and vulnerable adults. Teachers and members of the Women's



False security

A government-issued poster urges parents not to bring home evacuated children during the eight-month 'Phoney War' that followed the official outbreak of hostilities in 1939

There was a widespread expectation that a new conflict might start with a devastating air attack by enemy bombers

Voluntary Service (WVS), the civilian organisation set up under the auspices of the Home Office in 1938 to support civil defence and war work, then implemented these schemes. Local arrangements varied by area – how parents signed up their children to be evacuated, how much form-filling was involved, and how active local government officials were in communicating with families.

As part of Britain's official war history, Richard Titmuss was commissioned to study the effects of evacuation and bombing. In the resulting book, *Problems of Social Policy* (1950), he suggested that the varying quality of these local arrangements, and the confidence (or lack thereof) they inspired, influenced whether parents registered their children to participate in the scheme.

Meanwhile, in the reception areas, WVS billeting officers arranged accommodation for evacuees. Householders with empty bedrooms could be compelled to take in evacuees, but in practice the overwhelming majority volunteered. In return, they were paid an allowance by the government.

Most were not owners of stately homes or manor houses. Instead, it was typically lower-middle-class and working-class families who most often offered help. Their willingness to take in evacuees at short notice, creating considerable inconvenience, spoke to a moral acceptance of the obligation to help the needy in a time of national crisis. Unlike the wealthy, however, those of more modest means often lacked the space to separate themselves from evacuees whose manners, lifestyle and expectations were frequently very different from their own.

Mass movement

In some ways, the official scheme was an extraordinary success. In just a few days it moved around 1.5 million people from urban to reception areas without a single fatality. Had the expected aerial apocalypse arrived, this would have looked like an even greater achievement. Yet those journeys, and the travellers' experiences on arrival at their destinations, did not feel so orderly to those involved.

Most evacuees did not travel far, at least by modern standards. The majority went to rural areas relatively close to their home cities, though some were despatched much further afield. More than 250,000 were billeted in the Home Counties, 73,000 in East Anglia, and almost 57,000 in Wales. However, transport difficulties sometimes turned even journeys that were relatively short in miles into drawn-out tests of endurance.



How did Britain prepare for German raids?

Listen to Dan Todman answering questions about the Blitz on our special podcast episode: historyextra.com/blitz-everything-pod



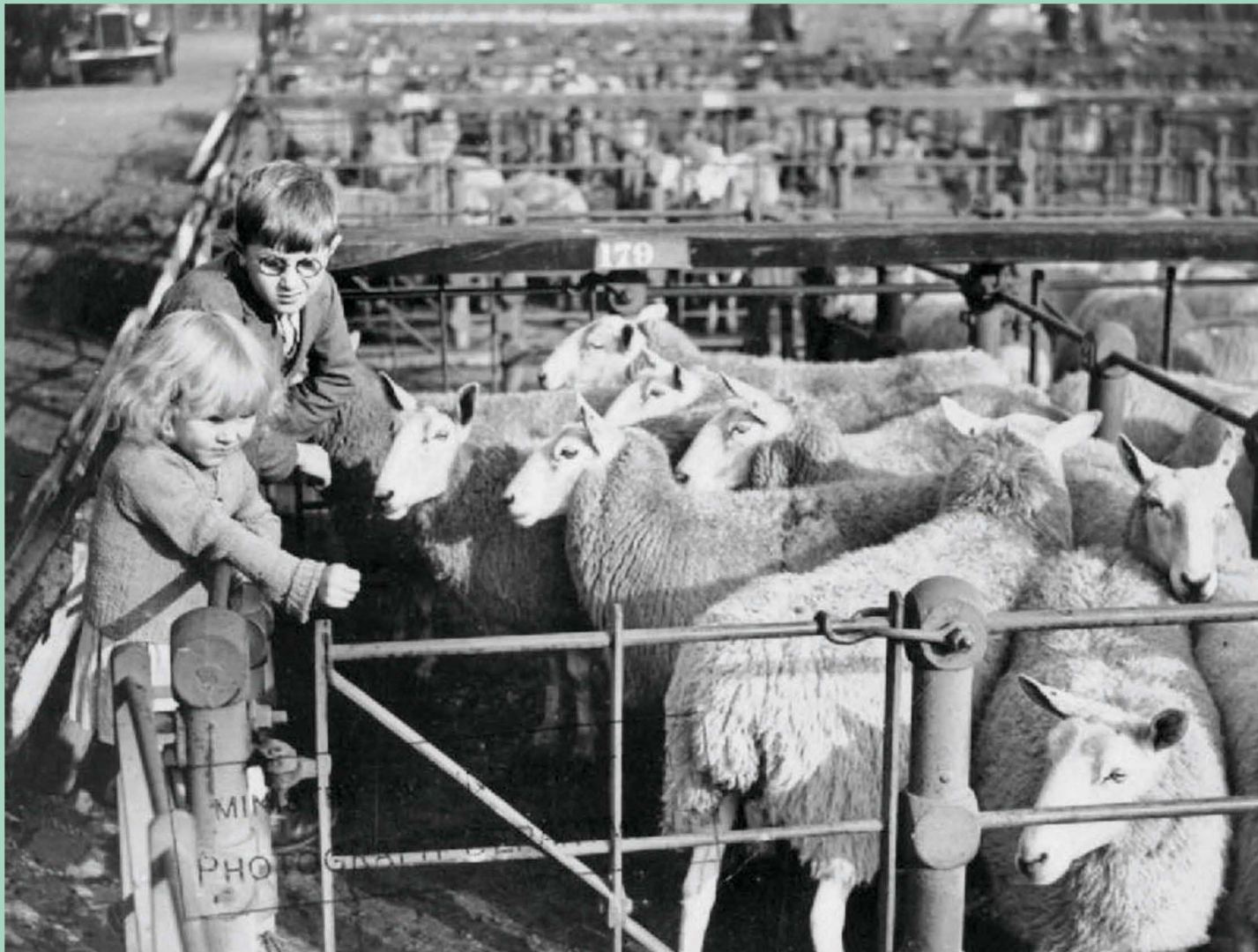
Family ties

Evacuees in Eastbourne. Many hosts in reception areas were prepared to accept only one child each, making it difficult for evacuee siblings to find places to stay together



Home away from home

A woman welcomes evacuees to her rural home. Some children were treated as cheap domestic labour, but others enjoyed great kindness from strangers who took them in



Free-range kids

Two young evacuees from London inspect sheep in Market Harborough, Leicestershire. During the war many urban children encountered country life for the very first time



Ready to roll

Children wait to be evacuated from a Scottish town in September 1939. Tens of thousands were relocated from Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and nearby towns

"I remember crying all the way to Wales," evacuee Beryl Fermor (née Hedges) later wrote. In London, in particular, the pressure to quickly clear mainline stations saw evacuees packed onto trains as they arrived, breaking up school parties and disrupting organisation in reception areas. In some cases, it was weeks before billeting officers and teachers tracked down all their charges.

Patriotically eager to bolster morale and reassure parents, journalists conjured up visions of the positive reception evacuees received. Reporting from "somewhere in Buckinghamshire", the *Daily Express* painted a picture of women preparing spare rooms and putting "hot water bottles in the beds in which London children would sleep".

In practice, the situation was more varied and often chaotic. In some cases, billeting officers got the children they had been expecting and had already allocated to receiving households, and children were dropped off to their hosts in a process that was brusque but at least efficient. In others, unexpected parties of exhausted evacuees were left in draughty church halls while locals came to choose the ones they'd like. Even when things went well, there were inevitable confusions and complications that compounded the uncertainty and distress.

Hostile hosts

Some evacuees enjoyed warm welcomes from kind strangers who recognised the novelty and terror of the children's situation. Having been instructed by his mother to look after his younger sister and "never let go of her hand", one former evacuee remembered his eight-year-old self watching anxiously as all the other children in their party were found a billet. Every potential host found reasons not to take on two siblings. Finally, however, a married couple arrived who asked how they could help and, when the situation was explained, "without any hesitation they offered to take us both into their home".

Conversely, some evacuees found themselves picked by those grudgingly looking for the least filthy or the most useful for household labour. "In retrospect," Audrey Demers (née Jones) recalled, "we were treated in a similar fashion to cattle, as the villagers came and looked us over and selected or rejected." Split up from friends and siblings, some children found themselves living with hosts who were abusive, neglectful or simply unwilling to tolerate for long this strange imposition on their home. Maintaining the dignity and welfare of evacuees in reception areas had been less of a concern in the planning than the need to get people out of the cities quickly.

Even judged on these terms, however, the official scheme fell short. Take-up was highly

variable. Only about half of London's eligible schoolchildren were evacuated. In Newcastle, the figure was as high as 70 per cent. In Sheffield, only 15 per cent of those eligible took part. Some families could not organise themselves to meet the timetable of evacuation. Others were unwilling to trust their children to strangers. For many, warnings of the horrors of war only strengthened a protective desire to keep their families together.

In the event, the UK did not come under sustained air attack until the summer of 1940. As a result, adult evacuees soon left the reception areas and families brought their children home. The rate of return varied substantially. Many London children stayed away for the whole war. Conversely, in Clydebank, Scotland, from where more than half of the children had been evacuated in 1939, all but 5 per cent had returned by the end of 1940. They were still there in March 1941 when the Luftwaffe launched catastrophic raids that, according to official figures, left 528 people dead and 617 seriously injured.

The initial experience of evacuation often brought differences to the fore. At the household level, the mixing of families in such close proximity inevitably exposed gaps in habits, routine and religion. Clashes of cultures released a flood of rumours in the reception areas – stories that revealed and reinforced class-based and regional prejudices about the urban poor. It was said that dirty children and slatternly mothers had arrived in inadequate and lice-infested clothing. They lazed around

Relatively short journeys turned into drawn-out tests of endurance.

"I remember crying all the way to Wales," one evacuee wrote



Bankhead Primary School, Clydebank lies in charred ruins following German air raids in March 1941 – after most evacuees had returned to the town

billets that were left increasingly filthy by their ill-mannered incontinence, it was claimed, and never contributed to household chores. In an angry Commons debate, Sir Henry Fildes, the Liberal National MP for Dumfriesshire, called evacuation "the dreadful scourge... placed upon the homes of Britain".

Head lice and bed-wetting

In practice, the deplorable condition of some evacuees was usually the result of poverty, not preference. Two in five child evacuees from Liverpool and Sunderland, for example, had parents who depended either on out-of-work benefits or on very low incomes. Evacuation came early on a Friday, when wages were most stretched. Many families simply could not afford to kit out their children with new clothes or items on the packing lists supplied by schools. Problems with head lice and bed-wetting were not helped by long journeys on packed trains or by billeting at unfamiliar houses with forbidding hosts.

"I can honestly say that we enjoyed being evacuees," remembered one, almost 65 years later, adding that "we were well treated and obviously loved by our adopted parents." For him, the experience made a lasting difference. His parents also moved out of London when they were bombed out of their home, and he never returned to the capital.

Yet his words indicate that he knew others had not been so fortunate. And evacuees' experiences did not have to be awful to be painful or to leave a lasting mark. "Home is not where one lives," said one girl, evacuated from London's East End to Oxford, "but where one has all the people one loves and knows." Another evacuee, interviewed at the same time, recalled the differences between their home lives and the repressed respectability of their middle-class hosts, explaining:



Tough times A mother and children travel home from their reception area. The evacuation experience was particularly challenging for women, many of whom returned home quickly

"I cannot do as I like in the house; I must also come in when I am told and sit down and eat my meals properly and not run out into the street with a slice of bread in my hand." A third bemoaned the fact that "If we play ball in the streets, a window opens and an old lady puts her head out and starts telling us off."

Mothers' misery

Those women who had joined their children on evacuation had a particularly miserable time. Accompanying teachers quickly sought to organise education for school-age children. In contrast, there had been no official preparation to support evacuated mothers. Their presence impinged on the private lives of host families in ways that embarrassed everybody. They had been separated not only from the family groups that formed their closest networks of support, but also from the world of urban leisure – particularly cinemas and dance halls – that offered some temporary respite from the travails of motherhood.

Devon's Inspector of Education reported that the lack of space and privacy created "a very bad psychological disturbance for both mothers and children. They become difficult, the children cry and are irritable, and the nervous energy of the mother is sapped. Sometimes she punishes them for nothing at all and at others she is over-indulgent and sentimental." Yet if women sought to go out, they often had to traipse the streets idly or

Those women who joined their children on evacuation had a miserable time, separated from family groups



Heading home

Children leave a school in Northampton en route home to London in late 1939, after mass bombings failed to materialise

risk further condemnation for moral lassitude. Given all this, it was little wonder that mothers returned home quicker and in larger proportions than any other evacuees.

Those providing accommodation didn't have it much easier. Having offered their homes in a crisis, they found themselves committed to sharing space with evacuees with whom they might have little in common, for the duration of a war that, the government made plain, would probably last for years. Even those for whom this proved a joyous experience found it demanding – not least because the value of the allowance they received from the government was rapidly eroded by the pace of early war inflation.

A phenomenon so large inevitably involved a full range of human characteristics. There were good and bad hosts among those opening up their homes, just as there were good and bad evacuees. While acknowledging the worst and the best behaviour, we also need to recognise the stoic tolerance of the majority who just tried to get by.

Clearing the coast

There were further waves of evacuation – officially organised and otherwise – later in the war. Following the fall of France in June 1940, the new proximity of German air bases and the threat of invasion sparked schemes to evacuate coastal cities. And after the start of concentrated German night-time bombing raids on British cities in September 1940, fresh rounds of urban evacuations were organised, both pre-emptively before the



raids and afterwards to relocate those who had been bombed out.

Uptake rates on later schemes were lower than in 1939. Only in 1944 did evacuation on a similar scale occur. That summer, as London was ravaged by V1 flying bombs, more than a million people temporarily left the capital, including 307,000 children and mothers. This time the danger was immediate and real, but once again few people stayed away long. Most returned even before the government declared that it was safe to do so.

By that point, evacuation had already been the subject of numerous publications. Even as it was ongoing, the process was being narrated back to the British people by journalists, commentators and comedians. It was also analysed by social scientists and, inevitably, co-opted by politicians eager to establish their own version of what the war should mean.

The public discussion that followed demonstrated the widespread appeal of the idea that the conflict ought to lead to societal change, but also the persistence of older ideas – notably the urban–rural divide and the alleged irresponsibility of the poor. The potency of both radical and conservative narratives was such that even today, when we think about what evacuation might have meant, they can colour our thinking. In truth, what evacuation meant to those who experienced it very much depended on their individual experiences. **H**

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Listen to an episode of BBC World Service's **Witness History** exploring the experiences of child evacuees during the

Second World War at bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct3bz8

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Evacuees cart belongings as they return to the wreckage of Berlin after the end of the war in Europe

EVACUATION NATIONS

Mass relocations of people from their homes were undertaken in countries across Europe and Asia

The UK was not the only country in which civilians were evacuated – or evacuated themselves – before and during the Second World War.

Japanese aggression during the Sino-Japanese war (starting 1937) forced 60 million people to flee their homes in **China**. Evacuating industries, ministries and civilians to the west became a key part of the Chinese Nationalist government's strategy to survive the war.

When fighting broke out in Europe in September 1939, **France** and **Germany** both evacuated civilians from areas on each side of their shared border in anticipation of military operations – although, just as in the UK, the lull in action over the winter of 1939–40 encouraged some to return.

The surging tide of Axis military victories in 1940–42 spurred enormous waves of mass flight. The 9 million **Belgian** and **French** refugees who took to their country's roads and railways in May–June 1940 offered a frightening vision of social dissolution and encouraged other states to put more effort into controlling population movements. Following the German invasion of the **Soviet Union** in 1941, one of the most violent but impressive state-organised evacuations of the conflict saw the core of the Soviet war industry relocated from the path of Axis forces and rebuilt beyond the Urals. In **Malaya** (now part of Malaysia), **Burma** (Myanmar) and **India**, meanwhile, the chaotic efforts to manage the flood of refugees from Japanese advances after 1941 further delegitimised British colonial rule.

Allied success in reversing early Axis victories depended on massive aerial and ground campaigns that forced evacuation and refugee flight. Through an expanding programme that came to include mothers as well as children, **Germany** evacuated millions of its urban inhabitants from the threat of Allied bombing and the advance of the Red Army. In **France**, occupation authorities required non-essential civilians to leave fortified coastal towns.

As the fighting fronts swept back through Europe and Asia, millions fled the demolishing force of the ground campaigns. Events at the end of the conflict, including the territorial settlements, ethnic cleansing and politically violent nation-building that underpinned the post-1945 order, displaced still more people.

There were many differences between the experiences of those in flight – what forced them to move, who organised their departure, and whether they could ever return. But there were also commonalities – physical relocation, tensions with those receiving them, and a sense of powerlessness. The experience of evacuees in Britain was distinct, but it was far from unique – and indeed more common than the stories of combatants. Altogether, about **175 million people** became refugees because of the conflict – far more than were mobilised into all of the militaries and munitions factories. This was an unprecedented scale of simultaneous popular displacement, involving about 8 per cent of everyone alive on the planet at the time.



England's forgotten hero

When the Hundred Years' War was reaching a climax, one man was fighting tenaciously to secure the English claim to the French crown. So why, asks **Joanna Arman**, is Henry V's formidable brother, John, Duke of Bedford, not better known?

John, Duke of Bedford prays before St George in a c1410–30 miniature. "For 13 years, John effectively held together the English presence in France," writes Joanna Arman, defending the gains that had been won after the battle of Agincourt (shown in the background)



As black skies faded to grey, and dawn broke on that fateful day in the early 15th century, an English army gazed across a field in northern France. What their eyes encountered was a vastly superior force: some 15,000 French-led troops glared back – their numbers nearly double those of England’s men-at-arms and archers. The English had faced seemingly insuperable odds before, and emerged victorious. But could they really triumph over this well-armed force bolstered by fearsome international allies?

The Hundred Years’ War had been raging for close to a century already, with negotiations between England and France coming and going – but all ultimately failing to decisively end the conflict. The balance of military success had swung one way and then the other in clashes on land and, occasionally, at sea. Many confrontations had ended with English longbowmen proving decisive. But as morning ebbed and the afternoon rolled on, the outcome remained uncertain. Finally, battle commenced – and the English won a great and memorable victory against the odds.

Sounds familiar? No, this is not a description of the battle of Agincourt, Henry V’s famous victory of 1415. Instead, it’s the story of the clash fought on 17 August 1424 – nearly nine years after Agincourt, and two after Henry’s death – outside the

town of Verneuil-sur-Avre in Normandy. Here, the English army led by Henry’s younger brother John, Duke of Bedford, hammered a combined force of French and Scottish soldiers plus 2,000 Milanese heavy cavalry, killing perhaps 6,000 enemy troops while suffering minimal losses.

Historians refer to the battle of Verneuil as ‘the second Agincourt’ – yet that clash, like John himself, is largely forgotten today. Why has such a heroic victory faded from memory? And what part did John play in that tumultuous period of English and French history?

Born to battle

We’ll return to the battle later, but to answer those questions, we must first turn the clock back 25 years. In 1399, Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster – better known today as

Henry IV – usurped the English throne from his cousin Richard II. John was just 10 years old at the time and, as Henry’s third son, would be unlikely to inherit the throne. Yet the young man quickly proved himself a highly capable leader during his father’s turbulent reign.

In 1403, aged just 14, John was made Warden of the East March, the region on the Scottish border around Berwick-on-Tweed. He soon proved his mettle defending England’s northern borders against Scottish incursions alongside his older cousin Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland.

After his brother succeeded to the English throne as Henry V in 1413, John was trusted with the rule of England during his warlike sibling’s many expeditions abroad, and was created Duke of Bedford in May 1414. The new king was closer to John than to any of his other brothers – even Thomas, Duke of Clarence, who was next in line for the throne. Henry was absent from England for almost half of his nine-year reign, and allowed Bedford to act as regent in all but name during most of that time.

John appears to have discharged his growing responsibilities with aplomb. Yet nothing could have prepared him for what happened next. In August 1422, Henry V died while on campaign in France, possibly from dysentery. England had lost its indomitable warrior king.

It was a perilous moment. With the crown now passing to Henry’s nine-month-old son,

Could the English really triumph over this well-armed force bolstered by fearsome international allies?

A forgotten medieval hero

Henry VI, and England embroiled in war with the French, the nation urgently needed someone to shepherd it through the dangerous months ahead. Luckily, Henry V had realised that Bedford was up to the task, and appointed his brother as regent of France just before he died. For 13 years, Bedford effectively held together the English presence in the country.

Ten months after his brother's death, John married Anne, sister of Phillip, Duke of Burgundy. Unusually for medieval noblemen, a picture of John (shown on page 30) created during his lifetime survives in the *Bedford Hours*, a beautifully illuminated manuscript given by John to Anne as a wedding present and containing images of both him and his wife. It reveals that John bore a striking resemblance to his father and brother: tall, with a beaked nose and dark hair cut in a pudding-bowl style.

A son's guerrilla war

John's marriage to Anne cemented England's alliance with the Duchy of Burgundy – and that alliance was to grow ever more crucial as relations between England and France continued to plumb the depths. In 1420, Henry V had been nominated as the heir of Charles VI of France by the terms of the Treaty of Troyes. This created a 'dual monarchy', by which the kings of England were entitled to rule both England and France. The biggest loser from the Treaty of Troyes was Charles VI's disinherited son, also called Charles – and, in the early 1420s, he waged a sort of guerrilla war against the English, bolstered by aid from Scotland.

It was in the younger Charles's name that, in 1424, the French Count of Aumerle (along with John Stewart, Earl of Buchan and Archibald Douglas, Earl of Douglas) joined battle with the English outside Verneuil, which had recently been taken by trickery. After brutal hand-to-hand fighting, English longbowmen and crossbowmen turned the course of the battle, and the French were routed. John then determinedly finished off the Scottish contingent, reportedly crying out the name of

John considered Joan of Arc a witch – and wasn't going to let her threaten Henry VI's claim to the throne



Under siege Joan of Arc leads an assault on Paris in 1429. Thanks to John, Duke of Bedford's extensive preparations, the city's English garrison defied its French assailants – to Joan's enormous frustration

Clarence – an act of vengeance for his brother, who had been killed three years earlier by a largely Scottish army at the battle of Baugé.

John took seriously his promise to uphold his nephew Henry VI's claim to the French throne and continued to defend the English territories in France over the years that followed. The fortunes of his forces oscillated in this war – not helped by the ill-advised marriage of his youngest brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, to Jacqueline of Hainault, cousin of the Duke of Burgundy. This union threw the alliance with Burgundy into jeopardy, as Humphrey clashed with the duke, and John spent valuable time and effort building diplomatic bridges with England's longstanding ally.

Then, in 1429, a French peasant girl named Joan arrived on the scene. John and Joan of Arc's paths crossed only a few times, and his relationship to the saintly French warrior is much misunderstood. In movies about Joan, John is typically cast as the villain, even the man responsible for her fate. In reality, the two never met, though Joan addressed two irate letters to him.

"You, Duke of Bedford who call yourself Regent of France... make satisfaction to the king of Heaven," she demanded in one missive. "Surrender to the Pucelle [maiden], who has been sent here by God, the king of

Heaven, the keys of all the good towns that you have taken and violated in France... I am commander of war, and in whatever place I come upon your men in France, I will make them leave, whether they wish to or not. And if they do not wish to obey, I will have them all killed; I have been sent here... to drive you out of all France."

At first, John wasn't too troubled by Joan's declamations. Within five months of her arrival on the scene, however, she had relieved the siege of Orléans, and on 17 July had the younger Charles crowned King Charles VII of France in Reims Cathedral.

By summer 1429, then, John was worried and annoyed. Like most of his English contemporaries, he considered Joan a witch – and he wasn't going to allow her to threaten the dual monarchy. So he devised a plan to stop her in her tracks. First, he sent word to England to have Henry VI crowned king of France (though he'd succeeded his father in 1422, his coronation hadn't yet taken place). Then, as his next gambit, he lured Joan and Charles to Paris, forcing them to expend time and resources in taking the capital instead of focusing on weak spots such as Orléans.

John shored up Paris for a long siege that summer, and set about winning hearts and minds. His plan worked remarkably well. When Joan arrived in August, she was forced



Empty gesture

Henry VI is crowned king of France in 1431. Despite his coronation, the French would soon be sending English forces into retreat

Lost love

Anne, Duchess of Bedford depicted in the *Bedford Hours*. Her death in 1432 was a personal disaster for her husband, and a diplomatic blow for England



THE DYNAMIC DUKE

John of Bedford's remarkable life

20 June 1389 Mary de Bohun, wife of Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Derby, gives birth to her third son, probably at Kenilworth Castle. He is named after his paternal grandfather, John of Gaunt.

30 September 1399

John's father is proclaimed King Henry IV (right) after deposing his cousin Richard II.



1403 In the aftermath of the battle of Shrewsbury on 21 July, John is appointed Warden of the East March, aged just 14, marking the beginning of his military training.

1414 At the second parliament of his oldest brother, Henry V (right), John is made Duke of Bedford and Earl of Kendal.



October 1422 Just weeks after Henry V's death, John takes up the office of regent of France.

May 1423 John marries Anne, younger sister of Philip, Duke of Burgundy, one of England's most important allies.

17 August

1424 John leads an English army to victory against combined Franco-Scottish forces near Verneuil-sur-Avre, Normandy (right). The battle becomes known as the 'Second Agincourt'.



August–September

1429 In response to a challenge by John, Joan of Arc and Charles VII of France attempt to take Paris, starting a fruitless siege. Bedford's careful preparations ensure that the city does not fall.

13 November 1432 Anne of Burgundy dies in Paris, possibly of plague. John marries Jacquetta of Luxembourg the following April.

14 September 1435 John dies in Rouen, aged 46, one week before the Congress of Arras ends the alliance between England and Burgundy.

to wait outside the city, failing in her attempts to draw her enemies into open battle. John had learned from observation of Joan's previous engagements not to take the bait, preferring to fight her on his own terms.

Following a siege, the French took the small suburb of Saint-Denys, but Paris itself eluded them. Eventually, in frustration, Joan of Arc appeared before the walls, screaming that all inside should surrender – or, she threatened, she would bring down the wrath of God upon them and kill everybody. The defenders of Paris were not impressed: an English soldier reportedly shot her with a crossbow, calling her a "bloody tart". Joan had to be dragged away from the gate, bleeding and humiliated, and Charles's army withdrew from Paris.

In 1430, Joan was captured – but John wasn't able to enjoy this moment. As Henry VI was now in France, the council didn't technically need a regent and so it threatened to fire John. As a result, he spent much of that year in limbo, unable to do much politically or militarily. He did not play a role in determining Joan's fate; by then, she had been condemned for heresy, so the matter was left almost entirely in the hands of the church.

John was not even present in Rouen on 30 May 1431, when Joan was burned at the stake. Instead, he was bringing supplies to

Paris, which continued to suffer frequent attacks. Their fortunes at that moment contrasted starkly: while the young woman who became France's potent and enduring figurehead was being brutally executed in Rouen, John of Bedford was being greeted as a hero in Paris. Yet the situation then was not as clear-cut as it may seem today.

A family at war

Henry VI crossed the channel to France in the summer of 1430, and for the next 18 months rivalry simmered between John and various members of the council, especially his paternal uncle, Cardinal Beaufort, who was determined to assert his own primacy. These tensions resulted in the regency being removed from John, and for a time Henry's council took charge of the war effort in France.

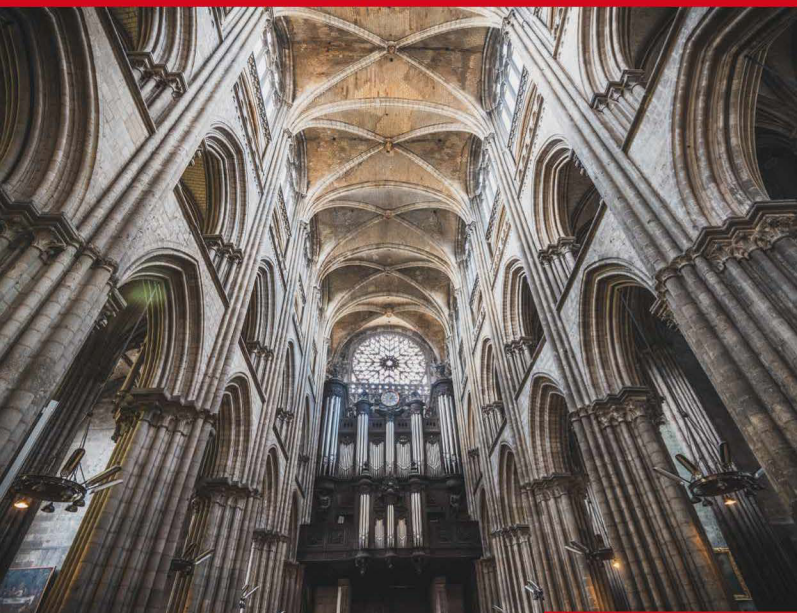
Yet John had always had a good relationship with the young king. He had been in England when his nephew was born in late 1421, while Henry V was away in France. And his campaigns in France had been undertaken, it seems, not only to preserve his brother's legacy but also to advance the interests of the young English monarch.

He must, then, have looked on with some satisfaction when – on 16 December 1431, at the tender age of 10 – Henry VI was crowned



What made Henry V great?

Dan Jones explores the martial monarch's formative experiences in our recent article: [historyextra.com/rise-henry-v/](https://www.historyextra.com/feature/rise-henry-v/)



Glorious end

John of Bedford was buried in the spectacular surroundings of Rouen Cathedral (above). Today, nothing remains of his tomb

Sibling stress

A miniature showing Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester with his second wife, Eleanor. Humphrey was a persistent thorn in the side of his older brother John of Bedford



King of France at Notre Dame de Paris. The coronation proved something of a turning point for both Henry and John. The king would soon depart for England, never to set foot on French soil again. As for John, he was immediately reinstated as regent – reflecting overwhelming trust in his abilities, even if some in the English court didn't want to admit it. He immediately set about reversing some of the policies Henry VI's council had put into place.

The plague in Paris

Then, in 1432, John lost the love of his life and his greatest ally: his wife, Anne. She was only in her late 20s, possibly succumbing to an outbreak of plague in Paris. Though John remarried the following year, he never produced any legitimate children.

Anne's death proved the final nail in the coffin for the alliance between England and Burgundy, though John managed to hold it together for almost three more years. During

this time he had to return to England because he was the only person considered trustworthy enough to mediate between the rival factions forming in Henry VI's government. His brother Humphrey and uncle Cardinal Beaufort were at odds – not for the first time – and the division was tearing the government apart.

John had another problem: the continuing conflict in France was becoming increasingly unpopular in England. In the words of medieval historian Jonathan Sumption, John was "the only statesman who truly understood the demands of the dual monarchy and in the end truly believed in it".

That belief was stretched to breaking point in the summer of 1435 at the Congress of Arras. This summit saw Charles VII and Philip, Duke of Burgundy embarking on a series of negotiations that threatened to conclude with both of them rejecting English claims to the French throne. A young and healthy John, Duke of Bedford might have better represented English interests at the summit. But John, who hosted the English delegation at the congress, was not young and healthy. He was in his mid-forties, exhausted and on the edge of death.

In fact, John died before the summit reached its end, breathing his last in Rouen Castle on 14 September 1435. One week later, Philip and Charles came to terms, ending the alliance between Burgundy and England that had endured for almost 15 years.

John was buried not in England but in Rouen Cathedral. Today, nothing remains of his tomb nor any other memorial. Though

England clung on to control of Normandy for 15 years after John's death, the nation had been deprived of its most loyal, capable and dedicated leader. After his demise, commitment to the war in France waned, and the divisions in Henry VI's government became increasingly virulent. By 1453, England had lost almost all of its remaining French possessions.

In death, as in life, John's reputation remained untarnished. The English would look back on the days of his regency as a golden age. He was even respected and admired in France.

One cannot help but think that if he had lived longer, the course of Henry VI's reign might have run differently. Would the king's famous and beloved uncle have helped to heal divisions – perhaps even persuading his nephew to go to France and fight? If John had produced a legitimate heir, would Henry have had a loyal cousin by his side when the House of York rose to challenge his throne?

We can only guess at the answers to those conundrums. But we can, at least, remember and honour the valour and loyalty of this long-forgotten prince. **H**

Joanna Arman is a historian and author. Her new book, *Henry V's Brother: John of Lancaster, Regent of France* (Pen and Sword), is out now



Listen to an episode of BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time* discussing

the siege of Orléans at [bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00713yq](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00713yq)



With John's death, England was deprived of its best leader. Its fortunes in France now plummeted



How empire ruptured rural Britain

We know that enslaved Africans and their descendants suffered in the distant colonies of empire. But, as **Corinne Fowler** explains, the colonial system also had dire impacts on people in the countryside of the 'motherland'



Land and unfreedom

TOP: Enslaved people work a Caribbean sugar plantation in an early 19th-century print

LEFT: An 1848 painting of English farmers. The impacts of slavery were felt in rural Britain

For an encounter with one of the most eye-opening legacies of Britain's colonial projects, take a drive along the A31 in southern Dorset. On the stretch between the delightfully named villages

of Winterborne Zelston and Sturminster Marshall, the road kinks nearly 90 degrees; lining the verge here you'll notice a wall – not hugely tall, but impressively long. Reputedly stretching for 3 miles and comprising nearly 2 million bricks, it was almost certainly built with profits from slavery.

This is the so-called 'great wall of Dorset' – one of England's longest, built around 1841 to encircle the vast Dorset estate of Charborough Park. It belongs to the Drax family, an old propertied clan who owned tobacco and sugar plantations in Barbados – and who massively increased their wealth by boosting profits through the use of slave labour.

It is easy to forget that colonial governors, slave-owners and East India Company employees and their heirs commonly became rural magistrates, customs officials, industrialists and politicians in Britain. The newly acquired land and social networks of these men allowed them to hold sway over other Britons in countryside regions. So it's important to understand that, when it comes to exploring rural history, it's not enough to ask where the money came from to buy country houses or fund village schools. What also matters is how these figures and their descendants exercised their power, wealth and influence in such areas.

Back in 2020, I undertook an audit of published academic research about National Trust properties and their colonial links. So I already knew that country estates such as Basildon Park in Berkshire and Harewood House in Yorkshire were built and landscaped with colonial profits, and that Speke Hall near Liverpool was bought and restored with money from Jamaican slavery.

I'd found, too, other architectural stories of places not managed by the National Trust that are also linked to Britain's colonial projects – including that statement wall around Charborough Park. These all highlighted the point that many of the ubiquitous colonial links in our countryside have been overlooked or forgotten.

British rural history is invariably depicted as a domestic affair that has very little to do with the empire. You don't find many references to colonial history in local history pamphlets, for example, nor in the nature writing of many popular authors.

To address this oversight, I set out to research a book of walks through regions with less-familiar histories of empire. As

I ventured deeper into the countryside, empire's impact on rural Britons was revealed in all its nuance and variety. My aim was to identify connections that were genuinely consequential to Britons who lived and worked in these places during four centuries of colonial activity.

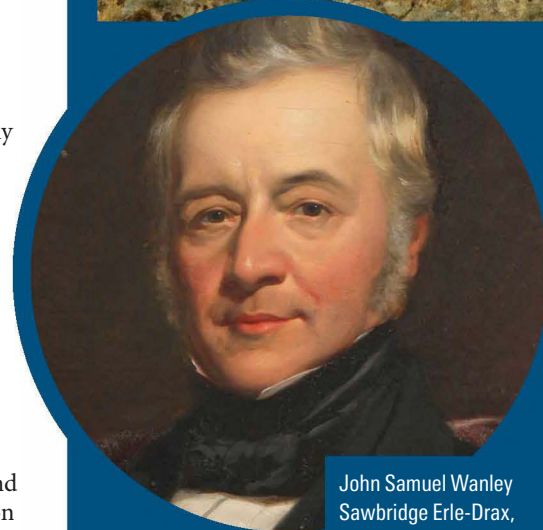
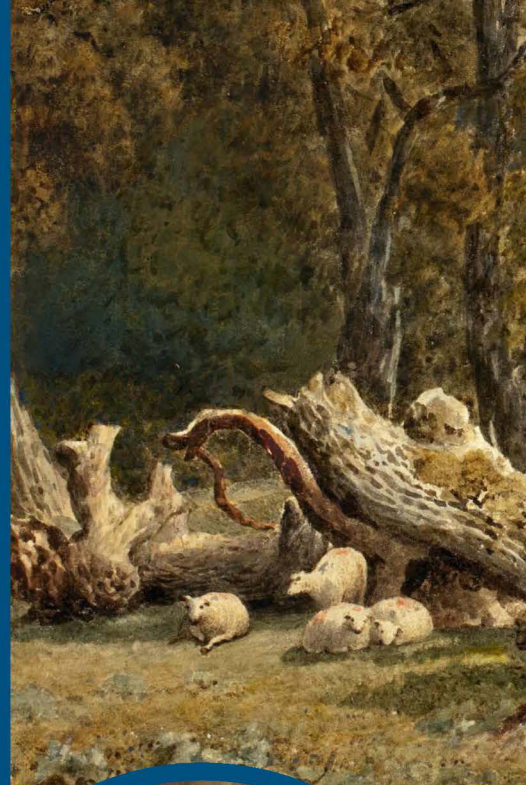
From servants to slavery

That search led me, among other things, to revisit the Drax story – and I began to wonder about the family's relationship with the ordinary inhabitants of Dorset.

In the early 17th century, people from that county were shipped to Barbados plantations to work as indentured labourers, selling their employers a set number of labour years and receiving at the end of their contract a lump sum or its equivalent in sugar or land. By the middle of that century, such indentured servants were being replaced by enslaved African labourers – a system 'pioneered' by the Draxes.

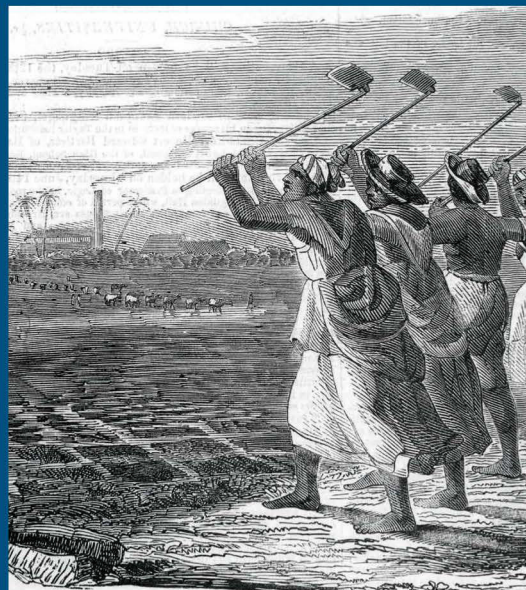
Notably, one member of the Drax family pops up in the historian EP Thompson's account of the 1830s Swing Riots – protests by agricultural workers against poor pay, working conditions and mechanisation that threatened their jobs. In 1830, the average farm worker's weekly wage of somewhere between seven and nine shillings was nowhere near enough to cover rent and the purchase of basics – tea and sugar, bread, potatoes, butter and cheese, candles, soap and wood – which typically came to around 13 shillings. During this period of recession and depressed wages, the Swing Riots spread west from Hampshire, and agricultural labourers in Dorset then rose up in protest.

John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge Erle-Drax (1800–87) boosted his wealth by marrying into the family, and received compensation for the loss of slave labour after the 1833



John Samuel Wanley Sawbridge Erle-Drax, whose wealth derived in part from Caribbean slavery – and who oppressed labourers on his Dorset land

Three miles long and comprising nearly 2 million bricks, the 'great wall of Dorset' was almost certainly built with profits from slavery



TOP/PHOTO/ALAMY

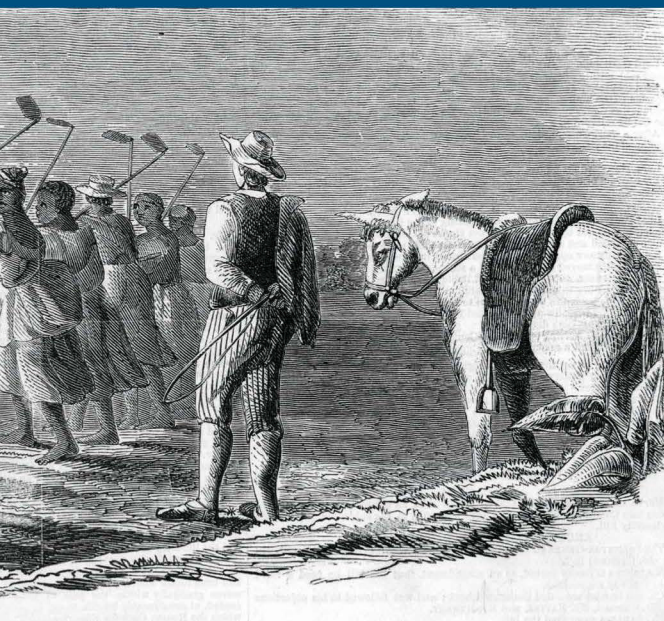


Different perspective

A painting of a rural scene. "Many of the ubiquitous colonial links in our countryside have been overlooked or forgotten," writes Corinne Fowler



Basildon Park in Berkshire, built in the 18th century by Francis Sykes, who made his fortune working for the East India Company



A 19th-century engraving of workers in the West Indies preparing a sugar-cane field for planting. In the English-speaking Caribbean, slavery replaced a system using indentured labourers from rural Britain

Slavery Abolition Act. He met protesting labourers with beer, and offered to raise their wages – then reneged on that promise. He led an armed group of landed proprietors to quell the resultant protests and to ensure that his labourers felt the full force of the law.

That episode recalls the actions of people elsewhere in Dorset who also campaigned for fairer conditions – notably the villagers from Tolpuddle, whose story became one of the most celebrated in British labour history. These six men, known today as the Tolpuddle Martyrs, started the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers – in effect, a union fighting wage cuts – led by Methodist lay preacher George Loveless. Under an obscure law prohibiting the swearing of secret oaths, they were unjustly found guilty of sedition in 1834 and sent to some of the furthest reaches of the British empire: the penal colonies in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania).

Loveless and his fellow 'martyrs' were among 4,000 British political prisoners and social protesters who, between 1787 and 1868, were transported to penal colonies as punishment for fighting for their rights. Loveless wrote about his experience in Van Diemen's Land, and his words represent a powerful indictment of the colonial system.

Working on menial tasks throughout daylight hours, convicts were inadequately clothed and often stripped to the waist. Punishments were severe – 50 lashes for attempting to escape, for example. Unsurprisingly, most prisoners' health deteriorated, and suicide attempts were common. One of Loveless's observations was that penal colonies exposed the dangers of unfettered power wielded by the British authorities.

Enslavement and enclosure

The system of forced labour that caused the suffering of so many enslaved people in Britain's colonies was also linked with hardship at home. With this in mind, I planned a walk along the Norfolk–Suffolk border. I call this route my 'enclosure walk', because it reveals the intertwined history of land ownership and slavery wealth.

For centuries, people grazed livestock amid the water meadows and lowland lakes of the East Anglian fens, and fished the wetlands that teem with fish and eels. The names on old maps reflect the management of these landscapes: First Fen, Second Fen, the Thirteen Acres. Others, such as Bullock Shed Close and Duck Lands Lane, suggest how land was used. Names convey observations of the natural world, too: Toads Lane, Birds Hill, Thistly Close. All of these reveal people's intimate relationship with land that was known and loved long before it



Building barriers A 1604 map shows new farmland boundaries in Dorset. The system of enclosure of formerly common land gathered pace in the 18th and early 19th century as wealthy landowners used acts of parliament to grab tracts for grazing, such as these fields in Swaledale, Yorkshire (left)

was enclosed with hedges.

Enclosure – private landowners erecting barriers to deny local people access to formerly common land – is massively significant to British rural history. Over the centuries, it effected a slow transformation from peasant husbandry to capitalist farming. Enclosure was responsible for removing landless people's right to graze livestock, catch rabbits and collect firewood on the commons. Instead, the land was allocated to a proprietor who controlled its use. This process accelerated rapidly in the 18th century: between 1750 and 1820, over 21 per cent of England was enclosed by parliamentary decree.

East Anglian injustice

It is no coincidence that this period coincided with the era of transatlantic slavery. A vast amount of land was purchased or enclosed using wealth from the West Indies or investments in the slavery business. Enclosure is not just of local and national

significance – it is a global story.

My enclosure walk began in the north-east Suffolk town of Bungay, from where I ambled along waterways and quiet lanes to Earsham Hall, a red-brick residence once home to Sir William Windham Dalling, an absentee slave-owner. Between 1799 and 1840, Donnington Castle, the Jamaican plantation inherited by Sir William, produced a staggering £150,000 (equivalent to well over £10m today). Together with two neighbours – George Sandby and George Day, also absentee slave-owners – he dominated the lives of 811 enslaved people. But these men's dominance did not begin and end on their Caribbean plantations.

Local Norfolk enclosure maps show that Sir William used his slavery-derived profits to consolidate and expand his East Anglian estate. He was a petitioner on the 1812 'Act for Inclosing Lands in the Parishes of Earsham, Ditchingham, and Hedenham, in the County of Norfolk'. The lands to be enclosed under this act included Outney Common and Dole Meadow, where the word 'dole' suggested lands that had been habitually given over to people without a stable income as an act of charity.

With distinctly colonial overtones, and

in keeping with enclosure rhetoric throughout England, Sir William and the other petitioners argued that this was "uncultivated... wasteland" that would be "improved" through enclosure. That claim is undermined by their promise to award appropriate costs to displaced land users.

Compensation would, the petition stated, be awarded to the owners of cottages or buildings who could provide evidence of ongoing land use. Any objectors were instructed to employ an attorney – which was, of course, beyond the means of most ordinary country folk. Commissioners' judgments were always final in the enclosure process, and any who disputed an unsuccessful appeal outcome would be evicted.

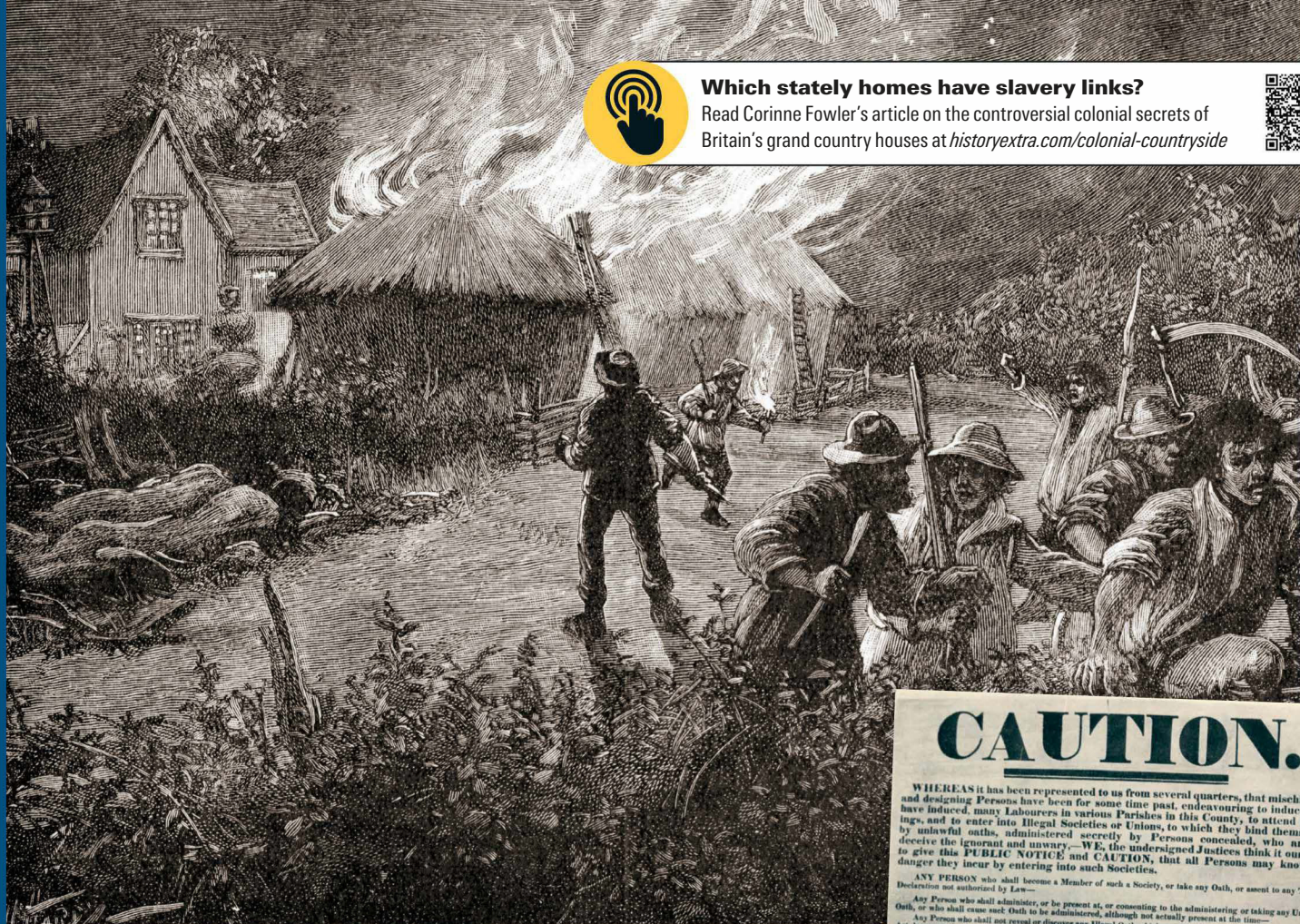
The 1812 enclosures were, indeed, contested by locals after notices were placed on church doors and printed in the *Norfolk Chronicle*. A public meeting was held to hear any objections put by an attorney – but only a handful of complainants could afford such legal representation.

Among those who could was a local man called Alexander Adair, who claimed 2 acres (less than a hectare) in the Dole Meadows as his by right; his claim was overruled. The enclosures went ahead, and the commission-



Which stately homes have slavery links?

Read Corinne Fowler's article on the controversial colonial secrets of Britain's grand country houses at historyextra.com/colonial-countryside



Burning issues Activists burn a hayrick in Kent during the 1830 Swing Riots. That campaign by agricultural workers protesting against poor pay and working conditions was met with harsh treatment by landowners – many of whom had become hugely wealthy from colonial enterprises

ers allocated just 5 acres (2 hectares) as “poor allotments”. These small plots were to be leased to tenants who would now be required to pay rent twice a year, having previously paid nothing.

Hand-drawn enclosure maps showing Sir William's new land resemble dense webs. Spindly demarcation lines show the proposed new plots – numbered in red – and existing buildings shaded in dark pink. Within these plots, the names of the new and former landowners are written in tiny, immaculate letters. The 1812 map shows that Sir William bought – using wealth derived from slavery – 280 acres (113 hectares) around the perimeter of his estate, gobbling up tracts around Earsham Hall that were deemed by the commissioners to have “unfixed and uncertain” boundaries. The map shows two private roads for the use of Sir William, his heirs, and two other landowners.

Walking along the old Norwich Road today, thin hedges mark the edges of the Earsham estate, with its flowerless meadows and gigantic oaks. In the 18th century you could have used more direct footpaths across fields, but these were blocked during Sir William's enclosures. Five public lanes and footpaths that previously passed through the

estate were rendered off-limits to locals, who were then forced into time-consuming detours as they walked the long way round. To this day, you still have to take longer, indirect routes.

Clearly, such inconveniences can't be compared to the horrors of chattel slavery, but Sir William's Jamaican profits were used to set in motion a series of smaller injustices in Norfolk. Thanks to that wealth, formerly common land became strictly off limits, and people could be prosecuted or fined for using it. Anybody caught fishing with nets in the broads, cutting turf or carrying off rocks or flagstones would be in trouble. Non-payment of fines would result in bailiffs recovering the full amount. Sir William also claimed exclusive rights to all timber, standing or fallen, on the enclosed commons. This was a blow for anyone who had previously collected firewood there, or used logs for building or furniture-making.

Sugar and slate

Another story linking slavery-derived profits with labour history can be found at Penrhyn Castle near Bangor, north-west Wales. Now owned by the National Trust, its interconnected

CAUTION.

WHEREAS it has been represented to us from several quarters, that mischievous and designing Persons have been for some time past, endeavouring to induce, and have induced, many Labourers in various Parishes in this County, to attend Meetings, and to enter into Illegal Societies or Unions, to which they bind themselves by unlawful oaths, administered secretly by Persons concealed, who artfully deceive the ignorant and unwary.—WE, the undersigned Justices think it our duty to give this PUBLIC NOTICE and CAUTION, that all Persons may know the danger they incur by entering into such Societies.

ANY PERSON who shall become a Member of such a Society, or take any Oath, or assent to any Test or Declaration not authorized by Law—

Any Person who shall administer, or be present at, or consenting to the administering or taking any Unlawful Oath, or who shall cause such Oath to be administered, although not actually present at the time—

Any Person who shall not reveal or discover any Illegal Oath which may have been administered, or any Illegal Act done or to be done—

Any Person who shall induce, or endeavour to persuade any other Person to become a Member of such Societies, WILL BECOME

Guilty of Felony,

AND BE LIABLE TO BE

Transported for Seven Years.

ANY PERSON who shall be compelled to take such an Oath, unless he shall declare the same within four days, together with the whole of what he shall know touching the same, will be liable to the same Penalty.

Any Person who shall directly or indirectly maintain correspondence or intercourse with such Society, will be deemed guilty of an Unlawful Combination and Conspiracy, and on Conviction before one Justice, will be sent to Prison, for THREE CALENDAR MONTHS, or to be committed to the Common Jail or House of Correction, for THREE CALENDAR MONTHS, or if proceeded against by Indictment, may be CONVICTED OF FELONY, and be TRANSPORTED FOR SEVEN YEARS.

Any Person who shall knowingly permit any Meeting of any such Society to be held in any House, Building, or other Place, shall for the first offence be liable to the Penalty of FIVE POUNDS; and for every other offence committed after Conviction, he deemed guilty of such Unlawful Combination and Conspiracy, and on Conviction sent to the Common Jail or House of Correction, for THREE CALENDAR MONTHS, or to be committed, against by Indictment may be.

CONVICTED OF FELONY, And Transported for SEVEN YEARS.

COUNTY OF DORSET.

Dorchester Division.

February 22nd, 1834.

C. R. WOLLASTON,

JAMES FRAMPTON,

WILLIAM ENGLAND,

THOS. HADGE,

JNO. MORTON COLSON,

HENRY FRAMPTON,

RICHD. TUCKER STEWARD,

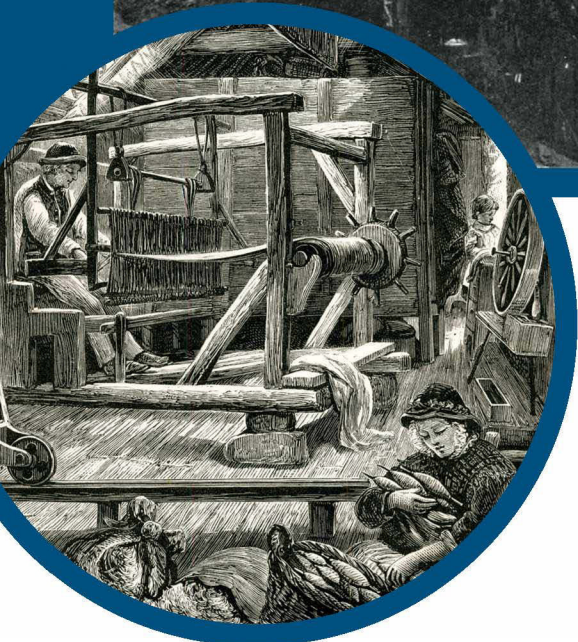
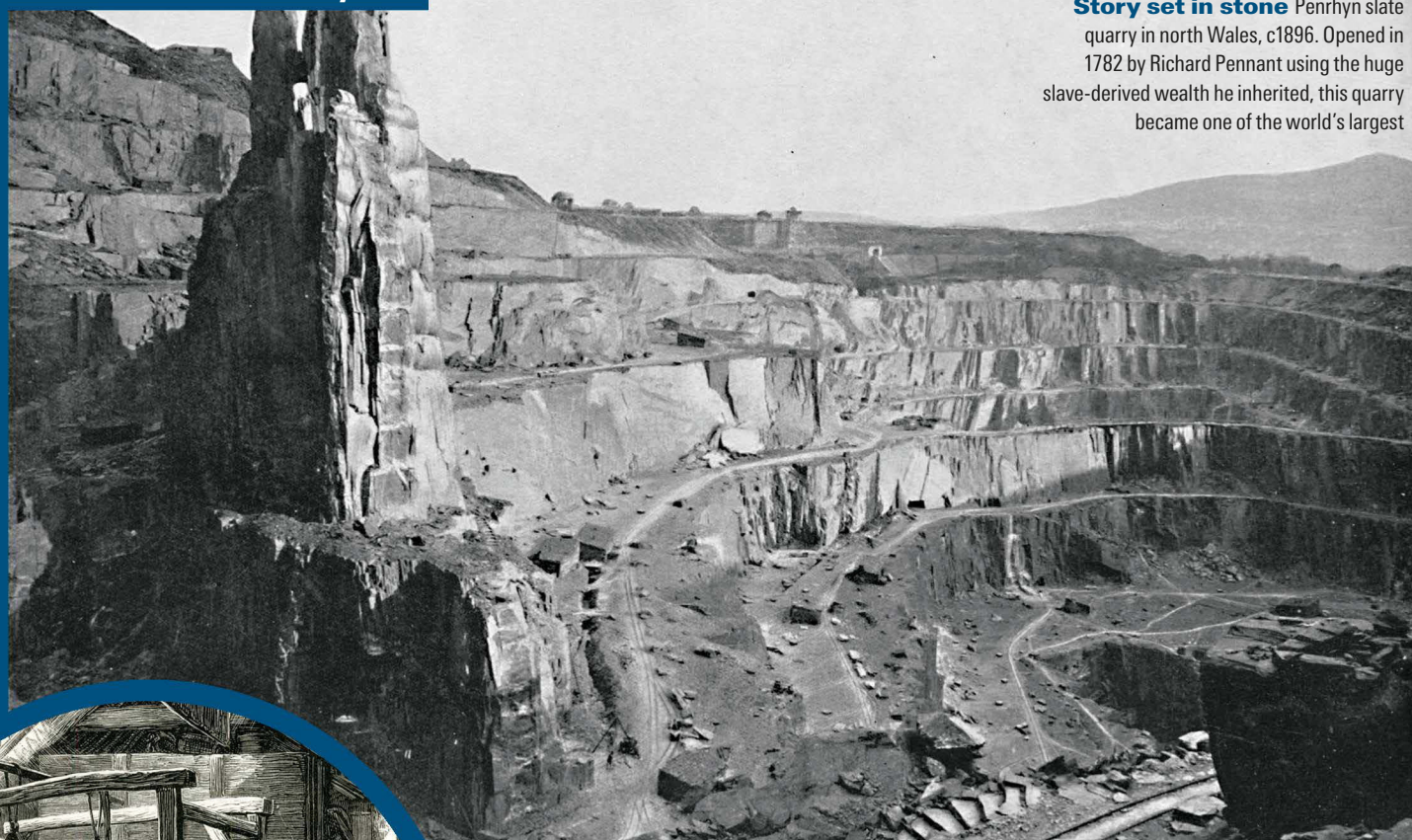
WILLIAM R. CHURCHILL,

AUGUSTUS FOSTER.

An 1834 poster warns agricultural workers against taking “unlawful oaths” while joining unions. Among those penalised under such laws were the six Dorset men known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs

Enclosure can't be compared to the horrors of slavery, but Jamaican profits were used to set in motion a series of smaller injustices

Story set in stone Penrhyn slate quarry in north Wales, c1896. Opened in 1782 by Richard Pennant using the huge slave-derived wealth he inherited, this quarry became one of the world's largest



Welsh wool weavers in a 19th-century illustration. Slave-owners bought Welsh 'woollen plains' to clothe their labourers in order to maintain productivity

Transatlantic slavery was directly linked to the livelihoods of Welsh sheep-shearers, wool-carders, spinners and weavers

histories of sugar and slate are persistently told as separate stories.

As soon as Richard Pennant inherited his Jamaican sugar wealth in 1781, he turned local slate producers off his land and, the following year, opened Penrhyn slate quarry. Within a decade, 500 men were employed there, and it became one of the world's largest slate quarries.

In a sinister echo of conditions in Jamaica, the quarry-workers' barracks were modelled on huts built for enslaved people on the family plantations; we know this from the work of historian Marian Gwyn, who studied regular letters that Richard Pennant received from the manager of his West Indian estates.

In 2022, the BBC Radio 4 series *The Museums That Make Us* stated that Penrhyn Castle was "built on money from slavery, the abolition of slavery and then the slate quarry nearby". That wording is misleading, because it implies two distinct, unconnected phases of money-making – yet the slate quarry was created with slavery-derived profits in the first place. The resultant combined sugar and slate wealth funded roads, railways, schools, hotels, workers' houses and the local port.

Bitter dispute

The Pennants' slate mines were at the centre of the great strike of 1900–03 – one of the bitterest disputes in British industrial history – sparked by the family's opposition to the North Wales Quarrymen's Union. The strikers lost, and 2,000 hungry, impoverished quarry workers left for south Wales. This

mass movement of labour was the long-term outcome of both histories.

I learned of one further local connection not too far from Penrhyn, on the sheep-grazed hillsides of north Wales. In the old county of Meirionnydd, part of Eryri (Snowdonia), local people produced a rough fabric called woollen plains, which was used to clothe enslaved people in North American and West Indian plantations. In the callous minds of the enslavers, this coarse Welsh textile was desirable because it bolstered productivity: proper clothing prevented enslaved people from becoming ill, and kept them alive for longer.

Far-away transatlantic slavery was thus directly linked to the livelihoods of Welsh sheep-shearers, wool-carders, spinners and weavers. Not that wool-workers were made rich by slavery: on the contrary, their lives were often harsh. The money was being made by people far higher up the economic ladder: wool merchants and landowners with sheep-grazing pasture.

Once again, two unrelated groups of people, separated by heritage and thousands of miles of Atlantic Ocean, were linked by their circumstances – bound within the colonial system of the British empire. **H**

Corinne Fowler is professor of colonialism and heritage at the University of Leicester, and founder of the Colonial Countryside research project. Her latest book is *Our Island Stories: Country Walks Through Colonial Britain* (Allen Lane, 2024)



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ANGLO-SAXON



Grave goods

It's one of the most famous discoveries in British archaeological history – but who was actually buried in the ship at Sutton Hoo? **Helen Gittos** offers a new theory about the grave's occupant, which could explain his abundance of exotic goods.

TUDOR ENGLAND



Voices from history

London today is a bustling, multicultural city. But what about in the past? **John Gallagher** takes us on a linguistic tour of the English capital during the Elizabethan period, revealing that the population was significantly more diverse than you might think.

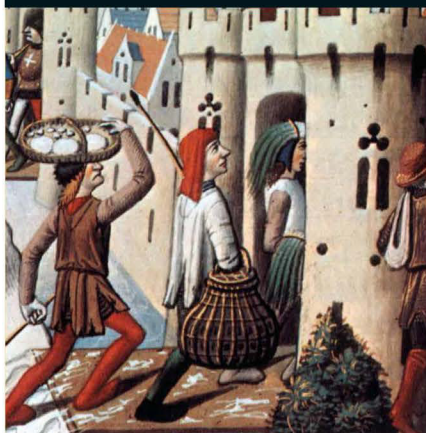
EMPIRE



Uproar in India

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 shook British rule on the subcontinent to its core. In this *Everything You Wanted to Know* episode, **Saul David** charts the rising tensions that fuelled the rebellion, as well as its violent progress and aftermath.

MEDIEVAL



City slickers

Were medieval towns really as filthy, dangerous and prone to fire as you might think? In another *Everything You Wanted to Know* episode, **Carole Rawcliffe** answers questions on urban life in the Middle Ages, revealing that city living was not as chaotic as it's been portrayed to be.

GLOBAL



Lost direction

The four cardinal points of north, south, east and west seem instinctive to us today, but that hasn't always been the case. In fact, early Islamic cartographers placed south at the top of maps. In this episode, **Jerry Brotton** explores the surprising – and highly politicised – history of the compass.

THE RESTORATION



A comic genius

The story of "pretty, witty" Nell Gwyn is one of history's greatest rags-to-riches tales. **Sophie Shorland** reveals how this orange-seller turned comic actress hustled her way to the very centre of power in Restoration Britain, armed with charm, wisecracks and withering putdowns.

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Where was the world's first museum?

►►► The institution that was probably the world's first museum lay forgotten for well over two millennia. Then, quite by chance, an archaeological expedition in the 1920s unearthed this lost wonder.

The museum was established c530 BC in Ur, in what's now south-eastern Iraq, by Princess Ennigaldi-Nanna (or Bel-Shalti-Nanna). Daughter of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus, Ennigaldi was also a high priestess and served as the human wife of the moon god, Nanna.

How similar was this pioneering museum to the places we love to visit today? Perhaps surprisingly, very. Ennigaldi housed her collection in an ancient building known as the E-Gig-Par, close to a scribal school where she taught children to read and write – so it's likely that her museum was used predominantly for educational purposes.

To help visitors understand the objects in her collection, Ennigaldi arranged clay cylinders to act as labels. Written in three languages, including Sumerian, they preserve her curatorial voice. It's amazing to think that museum labels – those bits of text that you rarely read in as much detail as you should! – have been around for so long.

The objects on display were related to key figures, places and events from Mesopotamian history, spanning a period from around 2100 BC to 600 BC. They included part of a statue of King Shulgi of Ur (reigned c2094–2047 BC); bricks from ancient ruins; and a Kassite *kudurru* or boundary marker showing King Melishipak I (1186–1172 BC) presenting his daughter to the goddess Nannaya.

This latter object reminds us that, as both a princess and a priestess, Ennigaldi acted as an intermediary between the people and their god; perhaps her museum was an extension of this duty. It seems to have been dissolved around the turn of the fifth century BC, soon after her death.

Ennigaldi's actions foreshadow how people have cared for, categorised and arranged their collections for thousands of years. Next time you look at a museum label, I hope you think of her.

.....
Dr Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth,
University of Edinburgh



The adder, the British Isles' only native viper species, suffered during the 17th-century trend for viper wine

What is viper wine?

►►► Pre-modern medications have a reputation for being made with disgusting ingredients including eel livers, deer fat, crab eyes and sheep's dung. One, however, stands out as being particularly vile: viper wine.

Starting in ancient Greece, treatments for skin conditions, tremors and a general loss of vitality were concocted using these venomous

snakes. Unfortunately for the adder – the one such species native to the British Isles – viper wine became popular in the 17th century, when women at court would drink a glass every day to preserve their complexion. Lady Venetia Digby (1600–33) got hers from her husband, Sir Kenelm, who was renowned for his recipe.

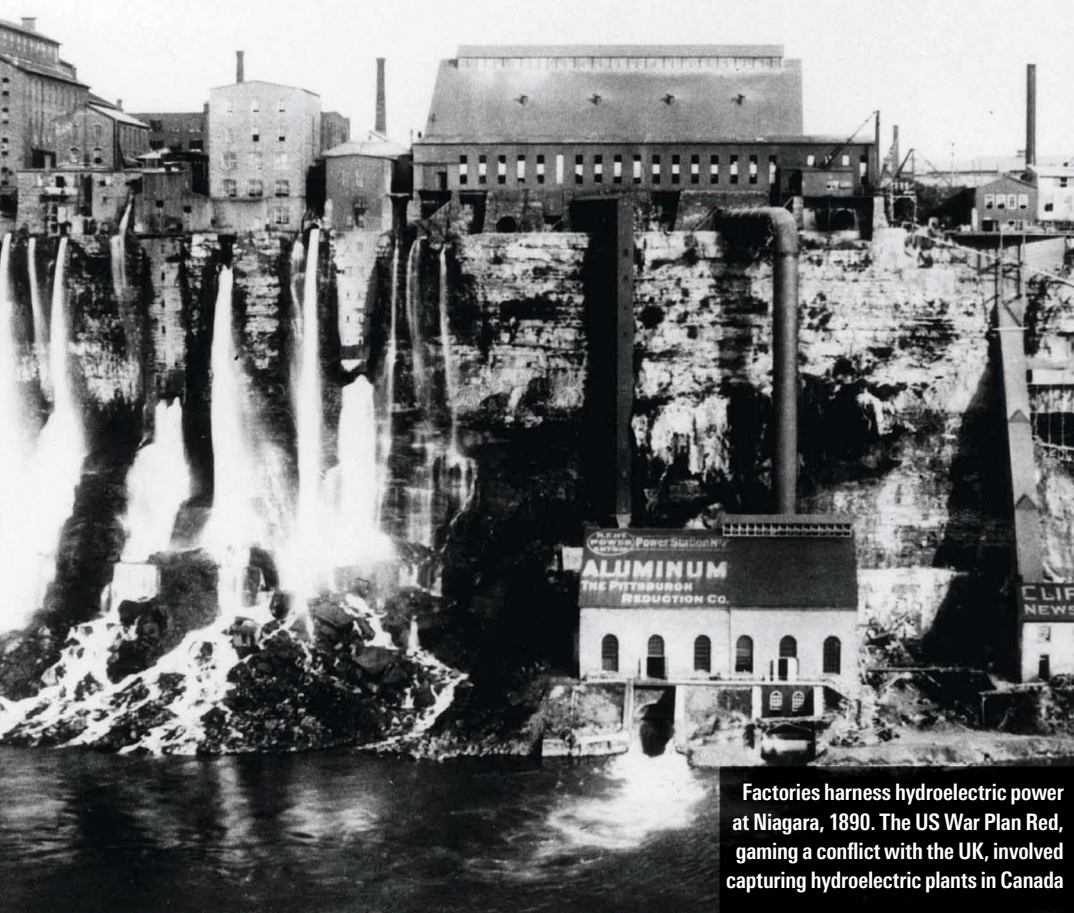
In truth, making it was not complicated: live vipers were sealed in a large bottle or cask of wine, and left to infuse for several months. One 17th-century recipe recommends first cleaning the snakes with bran. Even after such a scouring, the drowned vipers still left bits of skin and bones in the wine, but as one recipe noted, “you may take them out if you please”.

.....
Karen Bloom Gevirtz, author of
The Apothecary's Wife (Apollo, 2024)



Archaeologists excavate the remains of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur in the 1920s. Its museum contained cylindrical labels including the one pictured above right





Factories harness hydroelectric power at Niagara, 1890. The US War Plan Red, gaming a conflict with the UK, involved capturing hydroelectric plants in Canada

What was War Plan Red?

»»» In 1930, the US War Department approved a secret plan for a hypothetical conflict with Britain, codenamed War Plan Red. The two nations were allies, having fought on the same side in the First World War, but tensions had been creeping in during the 1920s. With Germany's naval power diminished following that conflict, Britain and the US were left as the two global superpowers of the seas, raising the prospect of a stand-off somewhere in the Atlantic that could escalate all too easily. Moreover, frustrations were growing on both sides surrounding the colossal war debt that Britain owed the US.

War Plan Red did not propose a direct attack on the UK or on British forces – particularly not at sea, where the Royal Navy remained superior – but instead an invasion of Canada, at that time still part of the British empire. This would shore up North America as a defensive fortress and prevent British forces from securing a foothold from which they could launch an offensive south of the border.

Crucial to the plan's success would be capturing the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the hydroelectric plants at Niagara Falls, disabling the Canadian

power grid. Simultaneous assaults on the cities of Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver would secure US control of industrial centres and railroads. From this position of strength, the Americans might force the British into a quick peace deal.

In truth, the creation of War Plan Red was nothing unusual, and certainly the Americans did not anticipate an imminent conflict. It was – and still is – normal practice for countries to draw up contingency plans for war, even against allies. The US had a whole colour-coded set of such schemes: Green for a war against Mexico, Brown for the US-held Philippines, Yellow for China, Orange for Japan. Though the UK did not have an official strategy for war against the US (that we know of, anyway), Canada had devised a secret plan, codenamed Defence Scheme No 1, 10 years earlier.

War Plan Red was updated several times during the 1930s, and mass war games involving 36,000 American troops were held. Of course, the US, the UK and Canada again fought on the same side during the Second World War.

.....
Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer

DID YOU KNOW...?

Poos and boos

In 1850, a renowned Austrian general was pelted with manure by workers while visiting a London brewery. Draymen at the Barclay, Perkins & Co brewery objected to the presence of Julius Jakob von Haynau, who was notorious for his brutal suppression of liberal revolts in the Austro-Hungarian empire. The men pursued him down the street, crying: "Down with the Austrian butcher!" Haynau was forced to hide in a nearby pub until local police were able to rescue him.

Imperial poverty

When the 103rd emperor of Japan, Go-Tsuchimikado, died in 1500 after a 36-year reign, the imperial family was so impoverished that his successor on the Chrysanthemum Throne couldn't find the funds to pay for a funeral ceremony. The late emperor's corpse lay slowly decomposing in a palace storeroom for more than a month until a donor was found to provide the cash required to give Go-Tsuchimikado a suitably imperial send-off and he could finally be buried.

The long view

A 19th-century American artist produced a painting that was half a mile long. In the 1840s, John Banvard – whose speciality was the creation of vast panoramic landscapes – displayed his magnum opus: a depiction of more than 1,000 miles of the Mississippi river, which had taken him five years to complete. Exhibited on two revolving cylinders, Banvard's work was shown in the US and Europe. In 1849, Queen Victoria had a private viewing of the panorama at Windsor Castle.

.....
Nick Rennison,
writer and journal-
ist specialising
in history



American artist John Banvard, pictured c1855. His painting of the Mississippi was half a mile long

WHY DO WE SAY...

...Baker's dozen?

»»» Various etymologists have suggested plausible origins for this odd idiom – a term for the number 13.

One popular version claims that medieval bakers wary of harsh penalties for short-selling bread – which was sold by weight – might add an extra loaf to each customer's purchase, just to be on the safe side. However, though the laws against short weight were indeed severe, they predate the familiar phrase (first recorded around the 1590s) by several centuries.

Alternatively, according to ancient custom, salespeople who went from house to house peddling bread on behalf of bakers were paid with a loaf for every dozen sold. This, then, may have been the source of the idiom, which was later reinforced by the dreaded legislation.

To complicate matters, other languages use a variant of the same term: devil's dozen. One proposed explanation posits that medieval bakers had

such a shadowy reputation that 'baker' and 'devil' became interchangeable. This seems unlikely, but a link between the two words certainly existed in the early modern era.

One Elizabethan play depicts a baker guilty of supplying a ship's crew with bad biscuits or short-weight bread. The devil appears, and the two begin to fight. The audience, surprisingly, encourages both characters, shouting: "Pull, devil! Pull, baker!" Eventually, the infernal figure wins. Perhaps this is the source of the idiom?

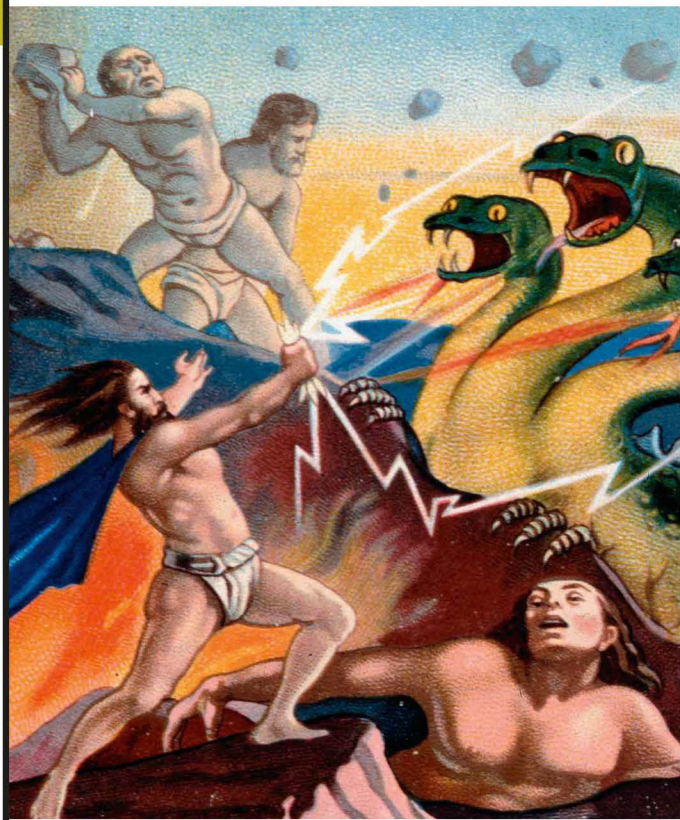
Incidentally, there was also a printer's dozen, derived from the fact that sellers were supplied with 13 copies of a book on each order of 12.



Anatoly Liberman,
professor and author of
*An Analytic Dictionary
of English Etymology*
(University of Minnesota
Press, 2008)



ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN McBETH



Zeus battles the Titans in a modern illustration. The sky god's mythical war with his own father, Cronus, and his allies ended with the establishment of a new pantheon on Mount Olympus

What was the Titanomachy?

»»» In Greek mythology, before the more-famous Olympian gods (think Poseidon, Athena, Aphrodite and, of course, Zeus) existed, there were the Titans, ruled by Cronus (or Kronos). Things went awry when he made the somewhat extreme decision to devour his newborn children so that they could not one day overthrow him. Eventually Cronus's wife, Rhea, tricked him into eating a stone in swaddling clothes instead of her baby – and, the surviving son, Zeus, set out to unseat his father.

Thus began the Titanomachy, a war between gods and Titans lasting 10 years. According to the *Theogony*, an epic poem written by Hesiod in the eighth century BC, Zeus's allies included his siblings (once he'd forced Cronus to vomit them back up), the one-eyed Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires – three enormous creatures with 100 hands and 50 heads each.

Zeus eventually emerged victorious to become king of the gods, reigning from Mount Olympus and imprisoning Cronus and other Titans in the deepest abyss of the underworld. Zeus's position was not yet safe, however: the Titanomachy was followed by the Gigantomachy – a clash between the gods and the giants. JW

Where does the word ‘redneck’ come from?

►►► Today ‘redneck’ is most often used as a slur to refer to working-class white Americans from the rural South or Appalachian region who are perceived to be poorly educated and politically reactionary. The term has a simple origin. Just picture labourers working long days in the fields, bent over crops, and it’s not hard to imagine how sunburned they would get – literally suffering from red necks.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the word became a handy pejorative bandied around by employers when attacking workers, especially those calling for greater rights and better pay. To be a ‘redneck’ was to be labelled a communist or trade union agitator.

Yet many workers embraced the sobriquet, wearing red neckerchiefs and bandanas as demonstrations of unity. When coal miners in Appalachia, particularly West Virginia, rose up against their bosses in armed uprisings known as the Coal Wars from the late 19th century, they became the ‘Redneck Army’.

These labour conflicts, culminating in the battle of Blair Mountain in 1921, established the term in the American consciousness, and the debate over whether ‘redneck’ is an insult or a badge of honour still rages on. **JW**



A tenant farming family prepares a field for planting tobacco in Virginia, 1940 – work that could lead to sunburned necks. Many working-class Americans later sported red neckerchiefs to reclaim the term ‘redneck’



Oliver Cromwell, pictured c1650. The Instrument of Government devised for his appointment as lord protector was Britain’s first written constitution

Has Britain ever had a written constitution?

►►► Yes – from 1653 to 1658, when Oliver Cromwell was lord protector of England, Scotland and Ireland. Called the Instrument of Government, it was the brainchild of Major-General John Lambert.

In late 1653, the commonwealth urgently needed a new settlement. Earlier that year, Cromwell had dismissed the so-called Rump Parliament, which had dithered over reform. Its successor, known as ‘Barebone’s Parliament’, swiftly imploded. Waiting in the wings was the constitutionally minded Lambert, who proposed that Cromwell should become head of state with the title of king. Cromwell balked at that, but accepted the title lord protector. In a formal ceremony in Westminster Hall, all 42 clauses of the Instrument of Government were read out and Cromwell was sworn in.

The idea that power should reside in a single person was not new for Britain, but the terms of this office had never before been circumscribed by a written document. The Instrument clearly separated the protector’s

power from that of parliament – the legislature. The protector would be “assisted with a council” and would govern according to law; a parliament would be summoned every three years, with Irish and Scottish MPs represented for the first time; and the office of protector would be elective, not hereditary. The Instrument also promised – radically for the time – to protect almost all kinds of Protestants, and their varying forms of worship. Many were alarmed by this toleration of non-conformity.

In 1657, the Instrument of Government was revised, and a second constitution came into effect: the Humble Petition and Advice. A year later, Cromwell died; when his son, Richard, abdicated in May 1659, the Rump Parliament was restored and the protectorate constitutions abandoned. However, within them lay the blueprint for Britain’s future constitutional monarchy. **H**

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Alice Hunt, professor of early modern literature and history, University of Southampton

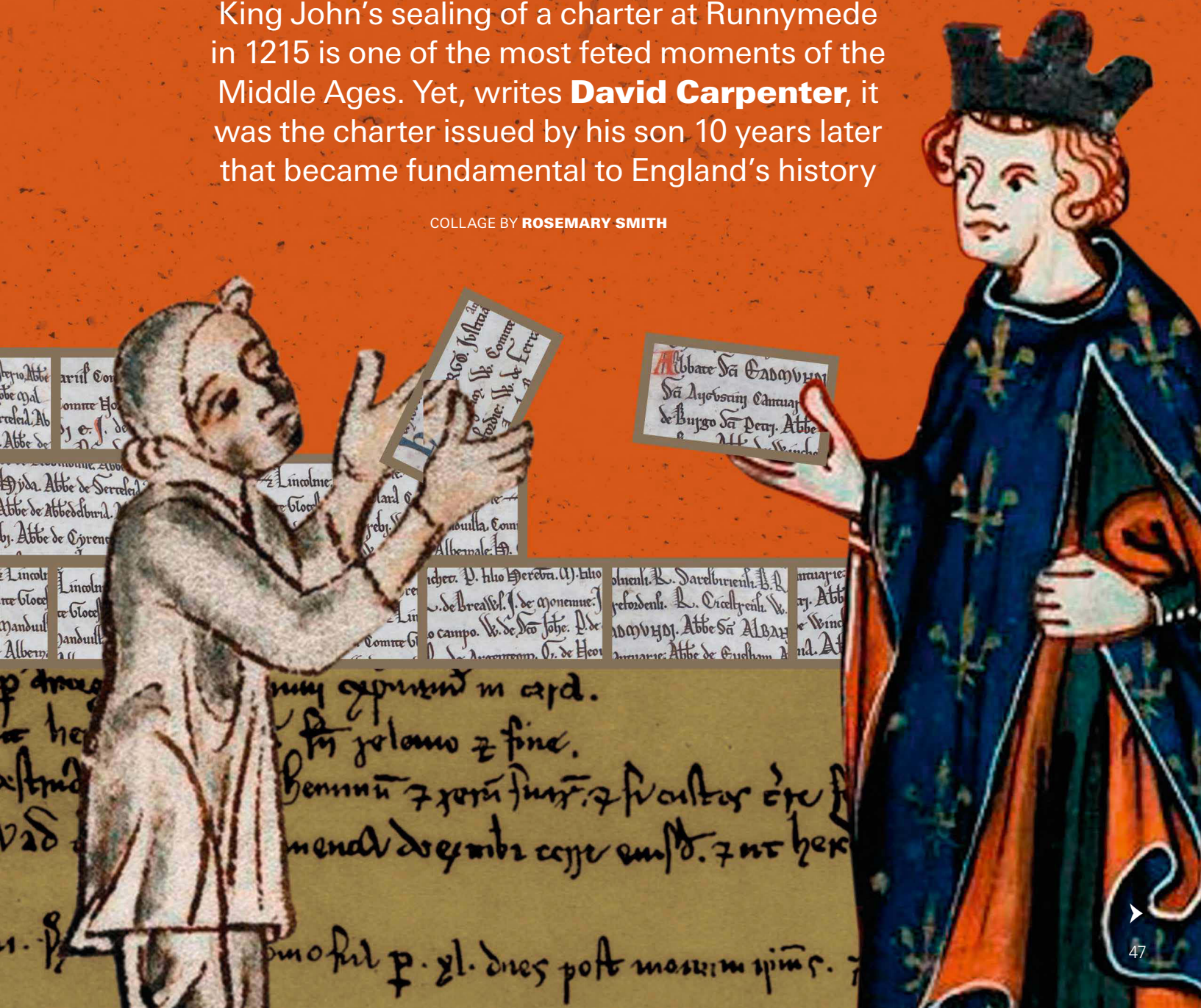
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: A c1300 depiction of a man paying taxes; Henry III in a c1280–1300 manuscript; Hubert de Burgh, a key player in the issuing of the 1225 version of Magna Carta; Louis VIII of France, who created the crisis leading to the 1225 charter. All are shown holding an excerpt from a list of names of those who witnessed the 1225 Magna Carta



HENRY III AND THE MAGNA CARTA THAT MATTERED

King John's sealing of a charter at Runnymede in 1215 is one of the most feted moments of the Middle Ages. Yet, writes **David Carpenter**, it was the charter issued by his son 10 years later that became fundamental to England's history

COLLAGE BY ROSEMARY SMITH



The 1225 Magna Carta

This February marks the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.

But wait – surely we already commemorated that milestone in 2015?

Certainly, on 15 June that year, the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, the archbishop of Canterbury, prime minister David Cameron and assorted dignitaries gathered at Runnymede. At the meadow by the Thames between Windsor and Staines, they celebrated the charter King John had sealed there exactly 800 years earlier.

That document, sealed under duress from rebel barons and famously subjecting the king to the law and promising justice to all, is widely lauded today as a milestone in the establishment of English law. Yet the fact is that, in the centuries after 1215, the term Magna Carta was hardly ever used for John's document. Rather, that was the name given to the charter issued nearly a decade later by King John's son, Henry III, at Westminster on 11 February 1225.

Although Henry's charter was based on his father's, the earlier iteration was usually called simply the 'Charter of Runnymede'. So when, in 1297 and 1300, Henry's son Edward I confirmed Magna Carta, he meant the charter of 1225 – and the same was true of all later confirmations. Indeed, though most of its provisions have since been repealed, those chapters that remain on the statute book of the UK today are from the 1225 version. So how did the Charter of Runnymede in 1215 become Magna Carta in 1225?

Abandoned promises

At the end of 1215 any progression beyond the Charter of Runnymede would have seemed unlikely, for it appeared to be a failure without a future – quashed by the pope, at the

king's behest. It had also, in effect, been abandoned by the rebel barons. Having failed to hold the king to its terms, they had taken another route: they deposed John and offered the throne to Louis, eldest son of the king of France. Louis came to England in May 1216, on a wave of support – but said nothing about the charter. Under his benevolent rule, he doubtless assured his supporters, it would be quite unnecessary.

It was John's death during the night of 18/19 October 1216 that transformed the situation. The minority government of his nine-year old son, Henry III – led by regent William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, and the papal legate Guala Bicchieri – was in a desperate situation. Louis controlled much of England. The only way forward seemed to be to accept what John had rejected and Louis was ignoring. So on 12 November 1216, a new version of the charter was issued in Henry's name. The most controversial and radical provisions of the Charter of Runnymede were omitted, but the great bulk remained in place.

This concession had its effect. Though there were no immediate desertions from Louis' side, at the decisive battle of Lincoln in May 1217 (when forces loyal to Henry III defeated an army supporting Louis), the rebel barons hardly fought very hard. None were killed; most simply surrendered. With a revised version of the charter accepted, they could believe their cause was won.

The baronial victory was confirmed by the peace settlement at the end of the war. Louis abandoned his claim to the throne and returned to France. In return, the minority government restored the rebels to their lands and, in November 1217, issued a new and improved version of the charter, accompanied by an entirely new charter regulating the running of the royal forest. It was at this



The Magna Carta issued by Henry III in 1225. This, writes David Carpenter, was the "final and definitive version" of the famous charter



A 20th-century painting shows John applying his seal to the 1215 charter. In more recent times this has been universally known as Magna Carta



BRIDGEMAN



Territorial gains

Forces of Louis VIII of France besiege La Rochelle in 1224. His conquest of Poitou led to the 1225 Magna Carta, conceded in return for the tax designed to save England's remaining continental possessions

point that the term Magna Carta ('Great Charter') was first introduced, referring not to its grandeur but to its size, to distinguish that physically larger charter from the smaller Charter of the Forest. Those two charters would now always be linked together.

With both in place, why might further changes be needed in 1225? Because the 1217 charters remained problematic. How could they be trusted when issued by a king only 10 years old and lacking his own seal? Instead they bore the seals of the legate and the regent.

There was another problem. Might it not be claimed that the charters were invalid, having been extracted from the king by rebellion? At a council meeting in 1223, that point was made by one of John's most rebarbative old minsters, William Brewer.

Two years later, the chance arose to put these problems right, thanks to a crisis overseas. In 1224, Louis – now king of France – overran the county of Poitou. Far to the south, Gascony seemed likely to fall as well. A gigantic effort would be needed to save the English king's one remaining continental possession – and for that, he needed money. With no reserves of treasure, the government knew that those vital funds could come only

from a tax levied on the whole kingdom. They knew, too, that such a tax could never be collected unless sanctioned by a great council – the kind of assembly soon to be called parliament. How to secure such consent? The answer was for the king to concede, in return for the tax, new versions of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest – versions that put right the deficiencies of their predecessors.

Once again, the exigencies of the continental empire played a central part in the

history of Magna Carta. The loss of Normandy and Anjou in 1204, and the heavy taxation designed to fund their recovery, had been a turning point on the road to the charter of 1215. Similarly, the loss of Poitou in 1224 led directly to the Magna Carta of 1225. However, while John failed to recover his continental possessions, the great tax of 1225 did save Gascony, which remained in English hands until 1453.

Doing the deal

Two men above all were responsible for negotiating the deal that led to the 1225 charters, though acting from very different motives. They were the justiciar Hubert de Burgh, head of government since the death of William Marshal in 1219, and the archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. For cautious, pragmatic de Burgh, the charters were simply a practical necessity. For Langton, one of the great biblical scholars of the age, they responded to deeply held ideas about the need for rulers to be limited by the law.

The texts of both charters, crafted by Langton and de Burgh, had new preambles and new conclusions designed to address the anxieties mentioned previously. In the

The loss of Normandy in 1204 had been a turning point on the road to the charter of 1215

The 1225 Magna Carta

preamble, the king (now aged 17) was said to act “of his spontaneous and good will” – a statement not found in the 1216 and 1217 charters, nor indeed in John’s Charter of Runnymede. At the end of the new charters now hung Henry’s own seal, introduced in 1218. It showed him on the front crowned and enthroned, and on the back mounted, armoured and brandishing his sword – images that encapsulated the majesty of kingship.

The conclusion to these revised charters also rebutted the charge that they had been extracted from the king by force. Rather, they stated, in return for his concessions everyone in the kingdom had granted him a 15th part of their movable property – essentially, a 15th part, by value, of their agricultural produce and farm animals. Producing some £40,000, roughly three times the king’s current annual revenue, this was the tax that saved Gascony. The charge of coercion was thus laid to rest. Magna Carta and the Forest Charter were the result of a freely entered bargain between king and kingdom.

The consensual nature of the new documents was further demonstrated by lists of those who had witnessed and, thus, affirmed the granting of the charters – unlike earlier iterations, which had no witness lists to speak of. All the good and great of the land witnessed the charters, whatever their stance in the civil war. The witness list was headed by Archbishop Langton, 11 bishops and 20 abbots. Then came Hubert de Burgh, followed by nine earls and 23 magnates. Sensing the significance and novelty of this certification, the copy of the charters made soon afterwards at Cerne Abbey in Dorset set out the witness list in beautifully elaborate fashion, and inscribed the place and date of issue in great capital letters.

Inclusivity statement

Langton, responding to ideas about how just rule should benefit the whole community, also did something to make Magna Carta more inclusive. The concessions in the charters of 1216 and 1217, like those in 1215, had been made only to people who were free – thus excluding the unfree peasantry who made up the largest part of the population. In 1225, this changed. The statement that the concessions had been made to the free remained, but it was qualified – indeed, contradicted – by the new preamble in which these concessions were granted to “everyone in the kingdom”. Likewise, in the conclusion, everyone was said to have agreed the tax in return for which the charters were granted.



Charges and concessions People pay taxes (above), as depicted in a 13th-century French manuscript illumination. The issue of taxation was one of the key drivers of the 1225 charter **LEFT:** A seal showing Henry III dominant on horseback



Langton moved decisively to bring in the church full-square behind the new charters. In 1215, he had felt unable to excommunicate those who contravened John’s charter, in part because it was clearly the product of rebellion. When the charters of 1216 and 1217 were issued, Langton was out of England; now, with the new versions clearly consensual, he and his fellow bishops sentenced to excommunication all who breached them. This set a precedent, and further sentences of excommunication were promulgated in 1237 and 1253, the latter with great publicity and with circulation of the texts.

Churchmen could profit as much as laymen from many of Magna Carta’s provisions but, in particular, they treasured the very first chapter, which guaranteed the freedom of the church. How right Langton had been to add it

into the charter at Runnymede.

Strengthened in these ways, the 1225 texts became the final and definitive versions of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest – but they were not without flaw. Despite acting “of his spontaneous and good will”, Henry was not yet 21 when issuing the charters, and therefore underage; this defect had to be put right in a proclamation of 1237.

More serious was the fact that the charters set out no constitutional means of enforcement. The 1215 document had given 25 barons the power to enforce its provisions, but the barons were omitted from the subsequent versions, with nothing put in their place. Though the sentences of excommunication elevated the status and publicised the texts of the 1225 charters, their practical effect is unclear. Not surprisingly, there were constant complaints that the charters were being broken.

The complaints had an element of truth, but some key chapters of Magna Carta were obeyed. The inheritance tax demanded from earls and barons, which sometimes ran into hundreds and thousands of pounds before 1215, was set at just £100. For the most part, widows of barons and knights were not forced into remarriage. Justice was no longer openly sold. The Forest Charter saw substantial areas removed from the royal forest. In general, the rule of Henry III was far less abrasive and extortionate than his father’s.

The texts of the charters also became widely known and, thus, sank deep roots into English society. Copies were made by religious

In the early 17th century, Magna Carta was seen as a bulwark against Stuart tyranny



What did Magna Carta mean in 1215?

Read David Carpenter's article on the impact of the first charter on the English people: historyextra.com/magna-carta-1215



Pursuit of freedom Hunters target deer in a medieval French illustration. The Charter of the Forest, issued in 1217 and updated in 1225, banned capital punishment for forest offences and reduced the area of the royal forest, freeing up woodland for exploitation

houses, magnates, ministers, knights, freemen and lawyers. Of the various versions, that of 1225 was easily the most copied. When the 1217 charter featured, it was often amended in the light of the 1225 changes, thus including from the preamble the king acting of his “spontaneous and good will” and, from the conclusion, him making concessions in return for the tax.

Those examining the texts – and marginal annotations bear witness to intensive study – could see that Magna Carta was far more than just a baronial document. Chapters such as those regulating the levying of fines and the running of local government benefited wide sections of society. The Great Charter would never have survived had that not been the case.

What's in a name?

By the end of the 13th century, Magna Carta was firmly established at the heart of the English polity and was well set for its long later history. Yet, on that point, one question remains: how and when did the Charter of Runnymede take centre stage and become

universally known as Magna Carta? In the early 17th century, when the lawyers Selden and Coke saw Magna Carta as a bulwark against Stuart tyranny, it was still the charter of 1225 to which they appealed; they hardly mentioned John at all. Shakespeare himself, in his *King John*, made no reference to the charter.

The change came in the next century, thanks to lawyer William Blackstone. His seminal work, *The Great Charter*, published in 1759, printed for the first time an authentic text of the 1225 Charter under the heading ‘Magna Carta Regis Johannis’.

His introduction, too, referred continuously to the ‘Great Charter’ of King John. Blackstone, it seems, was unaware that the word *Magna* had originally referred simply to the physical size of the 1217 and 1225 charters compared with the Charter of the Forest; he understood it to mean ‘great’ in terms of status, and thus thought it very much applicable to the charter of 1215 – the parent, as he showed, of Henry III’s later Magna Carta. (Blackstone also printed authentic texts of the 1216, 1217 and 1225 charters.)

Blackstone’s terminology stuck. In Bishop Stubbs’ hugely influential *Constitutional History of England*, published in the 1870s, John’s charter is called “The Great Charter” or Magna Carta. Likewise, JC Holt’s classic book *Magna Carta*, first published in 1965, was essentially about the charter of 1215.

In many respects, this seems absolutely right. Without John’s charter, as Blackstone showed, the Henrician versions would never have existed. And yet the charter of 1225, consensual in a way its predecessors were not, placed Magna Carta on new and firmer foundations. The charters of 1215 and 1225 should always march together. **H**

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David Carpenter is a professor of medieval history at King’s College London, and author of *Magna Carta: A New Commentary* (Penguin Classics, 2015). His biography of Henry III has been published in the Yale English Monarchs series



Listen to Melvyn Bragg’s in-depth four-part BBC Radio 4 series on **Magna Carta** at

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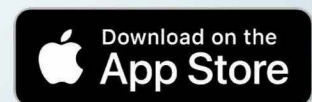
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BBC **HiSTORY** MAGAZINE



Fingers, frogs and fairies

Fortune telling was all the rage in the 16th and 17th centuries, and practitioners would stop at nothing to tap in to the supernatural. **Martha McGill** tells a story of Highland seers, tarot cards and encounters with the spirit world



The Fortune Teller, a late 16th-century painting by Caravaggio. The enduring popularity of divination "reflects an innate human urge to impose order and meaning on a chaotic world"

Fortune telling

As the younger son of a baron, Goodwin Wharton was determined to live well. Inconveniently, he had no money, but he was not short of ideas. He invented various devices, including one “for the squenching of public fires”. He went diving for sunken treasure. He got elected to parliament in 1679, only to damage his political fortunes with an incendiary speech claiming that the soon-to-be King James II & VII wanted to “destroy us all”. He even tried eating the still-palpitating heart of a mole, a traditional charm for foretelling the future. He hoped it would help him win at gambling. But nothing worked out.

By 1683 Wharton was desperate, and he found himself entering a “scurvy” tavern in a “poor beggarly alley” in London’s Covent Garden. Among the inglorious clientele was Mary Parish, an impoverished ‘cunning’-woman in her fifties. Wharton wanted a more effective gambling charm. Instead, he got a partner. Over the next 20 years Parish advised Wharton on his affairs, procured magical items for him and sent him on treasure hunts. She also conceived – by her own reckoning – 106 of Wharton’s children, although only one or two made it to adulthood.

Perhaps most striking were the pair’s dealings with the spirit world. Parish promised to introduce Wharton to the fairy queen, but problems kept arising: the way was flooded, the queen was on her period, a fairy duke had tried to poison her with chocolate. Nor did Wharton ever see Parish’s angelic advisors, though they apparently shaved his hair while he slept to give him a noble forehead.

But by 1687, Wharton had learned to communicate with higher powers. The voice of the Lord guided him while he gambled, and assured him he would seduce at least 500 women, including Mary, wife of James II. This never came to pass, but Wharton’s fortunes did recover in time: he re-entered politics and became one of the lords commissioners of the Admiralty in 1697–99.

The world of spirits

The story of Parish and Wharton offers a window into a world of colourful future predictions. Both were unusual characters, but their faith in the power of divination and the existence of spirits was commonplace in early modern Britain. Astrologers plotted the future by scrutinising the stars. Cunning-folk served local communities, offering divinatory services such as finding lost goods and identifying thieves alongside healing and removing witches’ curses (they were called ‘cunning’ after the Anglo-Saxon word *cunnan*: meaning ‘to know’). A flock of



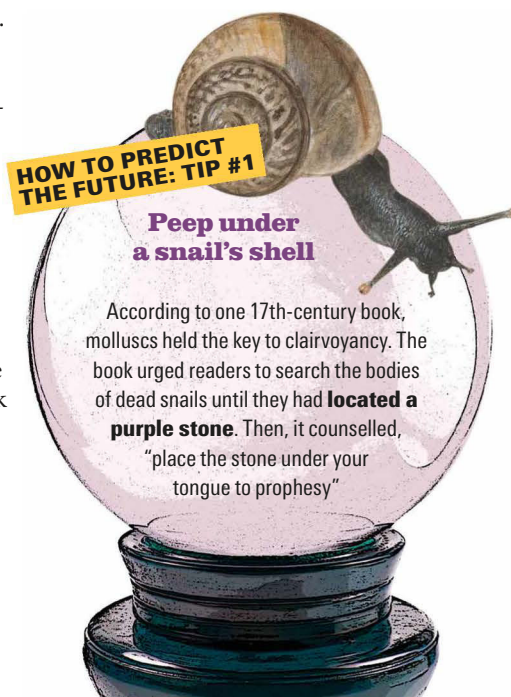
Seeing stars A celestial map from the 17th century. Astrologers were the go-to fortune tellers of the 1600s and predicted everything from the outcome of battles to whether a relationship was destined for marriage

fortune tellers read palms or drew on traditional lore to interpret the patterns of nature. Across its various forms, divination offered the illusion of control over life’s vicissitudes.

The most extensively theorised method of divination was astrology. Astrological predictions were published in cheap almanacs or proffered in individual consultations. William Lilly, who practised the art in mid-17th-century London, handled nearly 2,000 cases per year. He traced stolen goods, identified prosperous career paths, and advised numerous maidservants on whether their suitors were likely to propose.

Not everybody appreciated Lilly’s insights. An anonymous 1650 letter warned Lilly that his accusations of theft were going to get him “wonderfully beaten”. But Lilly was known across the country, and his influence extended to political and military spheres. When Oliver Cromwell’s troops were marching in Scotland, one soldier allegedly consulted Lilly’s almanac and called to the others: “Lo, hear what Lilly saith; you are in this month promised victory; fight it out, brave boys!”

While astrologers surveyed heavenly bodies, palm-readers looked at earthly ones. Palmistry was particularly associated with





In 1525, a Kent woman was prosecuted for predicting the future by listening to the croaking of frogs

travelling 'Egyptians', or 'Gypsies', who offered their services door-to-door or at fairs. According to a hostile 1673 work, 'Gypsies' claimed Egyptian origin and artificially coloured their faces to associate themselves with the "ancient black magi" famous for "the art of divination". In 1608 the playwright Thomas Dekker portrayed travelling fortune tellers as thieves but lamented that "simple country-people" would "come running out of their houses" in excitement at their arrival. Love, death and money were probably the focal points in their predictions.

Highland seers

People also told the future by observing the behaviour of animals. Owls, cats, dogs, ravens, magpies, ospreys and crickets could all be omens of death. In 1525, Joan Mores of Kent got in trouble with her local court for divining by listening to the croaking of frogs.

Even the bones of dead animals were etched with occult meaning. The minister Robert Kirk wrote in the 1690s that Scottish Highland seers could gaze into the shoulder-bone of a sheep to learn whether its owner had been wealthy, whether any of his kinsfolk or cattle were due to die, and whether



A 1660 engraving of astrologer William Lilly. One letter-writer on the receiving end of Lilly's attempts to identify thieves threatened to have him "wonderfully beaten"

HOW TO PREDICT THE FUTURE: TIP #2

Ask a lemon for romantic advice

One 1685 pamphlet advised pining lovers to hold two lemon peels in their armpits all day, before rubbing them on their bedposts. If your suitor **appears in your dreams and gives you two lemons**, the pamphlet declared, you will marry them

"whoredom be committed" in his house.

Underpinning these practices was the idea that God had ordered the natural world. Inspecting his work could theoretically offer insight into his plan for the universe. For those lacking patience or sheep bones, it was also possible to make more direct appeals to the deity. Divination by chance – drawing lots, rolling dice, cartomancy (using a deck of cards), consulting Bible passages at random – supposedly worked because God determined the outcome.

A popular village practice was divination by the sieve and shears. This entailed impaling a garden sieve with a pair of shears, asking two maidens to hold the shears up with their fingertips, saying "By St Peter and St Paul, [suspect] hath stolen my [item]", and repeating for every suspect. The sieve, it was believed, would begin to turn when the thief was named. In 1589, Mistress Wilcockes of Essex was said to have used this method to find stolen goods and predict the sex of an unborn baby.

Nor was Mary Parish alone in her attempts to command the assistance of invisible spirits. In the 1630s, constables rebuked the Welsh vagabond Harry Lloyd for fortune telling, palmistry and "familiarity with wicked spirits in the night time". Lloyd acknowledged meeting fairies every Tuesday and Thursday but added that he was just trying to make his neighbours rich.

Sarah Skelhorn, who lived in London and Dorset in the first half of the 17th century, chose the more discreet option of scrying



Hand of fate A fortune teller reads a man's palm in the 17th century. Following the Reformation, a growing number of diviners were hauled before the courts for fraud

angels in a glass. (Scrying involved gazing into a medium with a reflective surface, as a way of receiving images, visions and messages.) So skilled was she in charming her otherworldly advisors that they reportedly began to follow her around, appearing in every room of her house until she was fed up with them. Other diviners had ghosts or fairies who regularly visited them. For these individuals, divination offered real and meaningful connections with a hidden world of supernatural beings.

Sinful and scandalous

Although many divinatory practices drew on Christian theology, the ecclesiastical authorities were largely unimpressed. Following the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, many popular religious and magical practices were condemned as superstitious or devilish. In 1702, Lady Janet Blair of Tonderghie, Gallo-way, was upbraided by the kirk for using the sieve and shears. She publicly apologised for employing a “very sinful & scandalous practice” and forswore it along with “all spells and charms usual to wizards”.

Diviners could also be hauled before secular courts for fraud. In 1636, Margaret Snelling was prosecuted at Devon for “deceiving and cozening of the king's subjects by fortune telling and deluding them”. The court ordered that she be “publicly whipped and pilloried” on the next market day. Travelling fortune tellers were sometimes prosecuted for vagrancy. ‘Egyptians’ were explicitly targeted in a 1530 parliamentary act that endeavoured to banish them from the country, citing

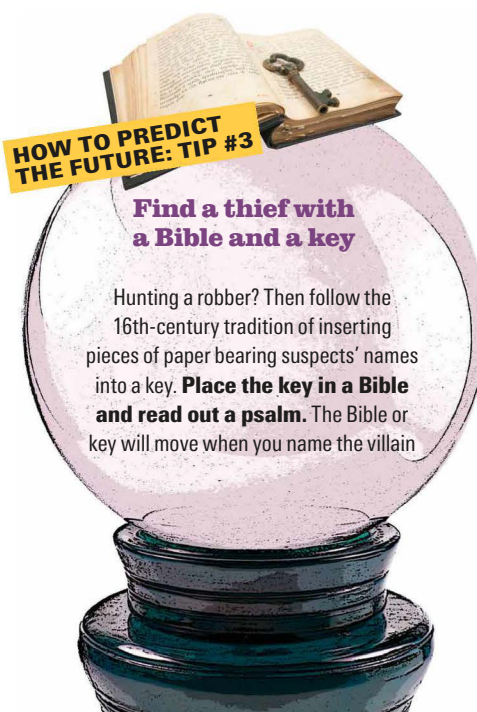
In 1616, a diviner testified that a fairy had told her to boil an egg and collect the condensation

(among other points) their “crafty” use of palm-reading.

Sometimes diviners were accused of more serious crimes. In the early 1530s, Richard Jones of Oxford was charged with treason after allegedly predicting the death of the monarch. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Richard wrote two pleading letters to the statesman Thomas Cromwell. He protested that he had never “imagined the destruction of no man or woman as God shall save my soul”, and boldly proposed that he win his freedom by making Cromwell a philosopher's stone. He was eventually released, apparently without having turned base metal to gold.

In general, though, diviners were not prosecuted for witchcraft. Learned astrologers had too much social capital, while cunning-folk offered benevolent magical services, unlike witches who used magic to harm (their neighbours typically recognised the distinction). Both astrologers and cunning-folk, moreover, were predominantly male, whereas the archetype of the witch was female. Itinerant fortune tellers were largely women, but living outside community structures offered some protection as most witchcraft accusations grew out of neighbourly quarrels.

There were exceptions. In 1616, Elspeth Reoch was prosecuted for witchcraft in Orkney. Elspeth testified that a fairy man had instructed her to boil an egg and collect the condensation on three Sundays, then rub it on her eyes with unwashed hands. This had given her the gift of second sight, and she had taken to travelling around telling people “what they had done and what they should





do". The court determined that she had been dealing with the devil, and she was executed.

Early modern authorities were keen both to expand their control over the populace and to protect them from diabolic machinations, which meant that the work of magical practitioners was never entirely risk-free.

The modern witch

The 18th century saw a shift in the cultural role of magic. In 1736, witchcraft was decriminalised. Educated men increasingly mocked popular magical beliefs at coffee-houses and in printed works. Ecclesiastical and secular authorities continued to condemn astrologers, cunning-folk and fortune tellers as frauds, but largely ceased to suggest that they might be in league with the devil.

In his 1785 poem *Halloween*, Robert Burns described how "merry, friendly, country folks" would gather together to practise divination at Halloween. They threw nuts on the fire to foretell whether a romance would be harmonious, and tugged stalks of kale out of the earth to learn about the appearance and nature of a future spouse. Burns attributed these rituals to "unenlightened minds". He had to acknowledge, however, that the "passion of prying into futurity" was a "striking part of the history of human nature".



Future proof A woman reads a customer's fortune in a cartoon from the 1860s. Divination by tarot cards (shown left) retains its appeal some 250 years after it was first popularised in 18th-century France



Cunning-folk continued to offer divinatory services throughout the 19th century. In urban areas especially, astrologers and fortune tellers maintained flourishing trades. An 1885 article commented snidely that "the modern witch" did not ride around on a broomstick, but "sits at home to receive the confidences of silly shop and servant girls... enrich[ing] her pocket by promising husbands, children, or fortune to those who will cross her hand with a 'bit of silver'". In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, palm-readers – often from Roma communities – offered their services from booths at seaside resorts.

Over the course of the 20th century, improvements in medical care, social services and insurance reduced the likelihood of catastrophic life upsets, eroding much of the market for divinatory services. Sieves, shears and the fairy queen have largely been forgotten nowadays, and even the most determined gamblers rarely ingest throbbing mole hearts.

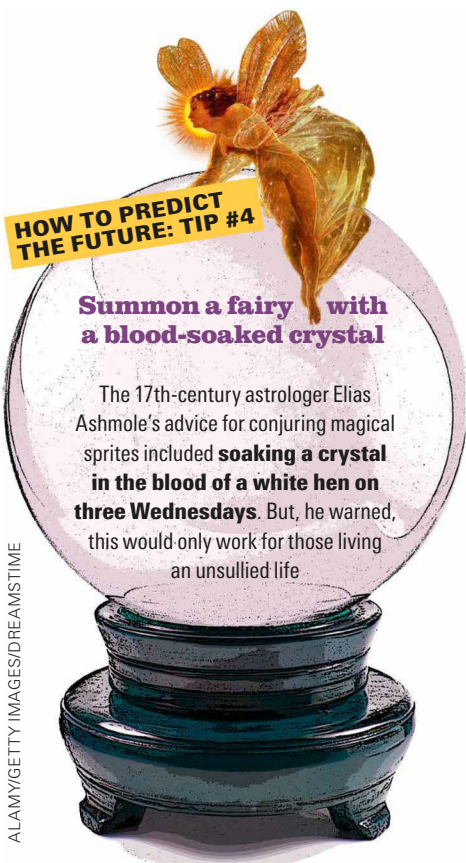
Yet magazines offering horoscopes capture something of the spirit of early modern astrological almanacs, and professional astrologers continue to use broadly traditional methods. Other surviving practices include scrying with crystal balls and palmistry. Divination by tarot cards, a practice first popularised in late 18th-century France, has also had success in contemporary society. The enduring appeal of divination perhaps reflects an innate human urge to impose order and meaning on a chaotic world. **E**

Martha McGill is an honorary research fellow at the University of Warwick. You'll find her online exhibition on early modern fortune telling at starsandsieves.com



You can hear Martha McGill discuss historical fortune tellers on an episode of BBC Radio Scotland's **Time Travels** at bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001hmry

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Summon a fairy with a blood-soaked crystal

The 17th-century astrologer Elias Ashmole's advice for conjuring magical sprites included **soaking a crystal in the blood of a white hen on three Wednesdays**. But, he warned, this would only work for those living an unsullied life

Slavery, exploitation and racism. These tragedies have long dominated histories of Africa. But there's another way to tell this story. And it's one that puts **Africans right at the centre** of their continent's extraordinarily rich and vibrant past

By **Luke Pepera**



AKG-IMAGES

Hidden treasure

A 16th/17th-century altar from the Kingdom of Benin. Our knowledge of African history has been blighted by a poor understanding of its astonishing depth and breadth, argues Luke Pepera



In 1414, in the Chinese city of Nanjing, a giraffe caused a stir. Amid a crowd of shocked, noble spectators, an official, leading the creature via a rope tied round its face, presented it to China's Yongle emperor. His officials said it was a *qilin* – an auspicious unicorn – which his sage governance had made appear.

This giraffe was a gift from the sultan of Bengal. But it had originally come from Africa – specifically, the city-state of Malindi in today's Kenya. In 1415, ambassadors from Malindi and Mogadishu sailed to China. In a special ceremony, the Malindi ambassadors gifted the Yongle emperor another giraffe. Delighted at having received his second *qilin*, the Yongle emperor gave an order. His senior eunuch, Zheng He, whom he'd charged with overseeing the construction of a 200-strong fleet of treasure ships, was to sail to Malindi to obtain more giraffes and other goods.

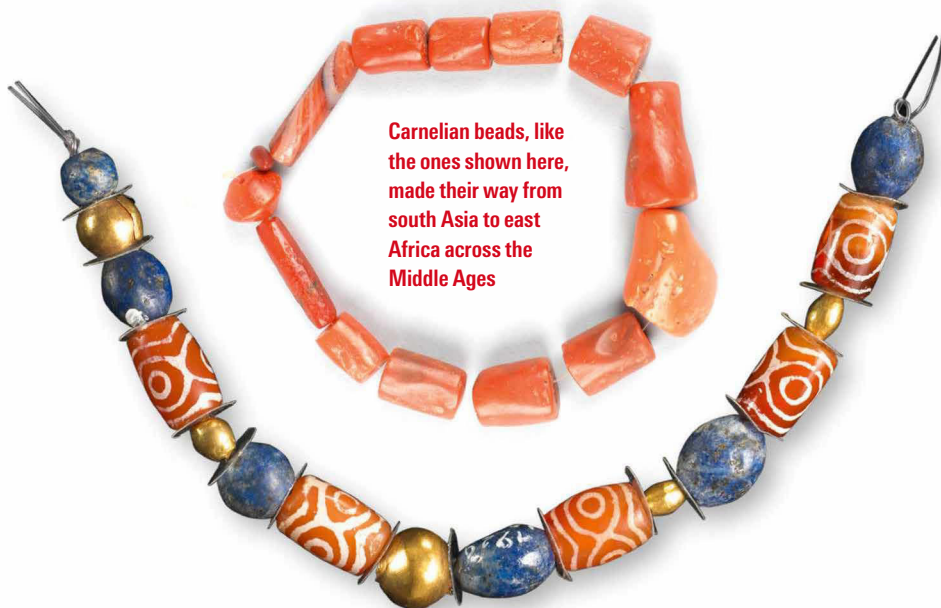
With the holds of his ships full of treasures, including gold, silver, silk and ceramics, Zheng He set sail for Malindi in 1417. He exchanged what he had for goods including live animals such as leopards and zebras, frankincense and ivory. Sometime between then and 1423, Malindi's king himself sailed to China to meet the Yongle emperor in Nanjing. He made it as far as Fujian, a province in south-eastern China, where he died, seemingly succumbing to illness. He was buried in Fujian, and the Yongle emperor decreed that his grave be given a small sacrifice every year.

This is an intriguing story. But for Africa, it's not extraordinary. For at least 2,000 years, African civilisations have been plugged into international trade networks. Third-century AD Nubia (now northern Sudan and southern Egypt) exported goods including gold, ivory and ostrich feathers to Rome and Yemen. Along Africa's eastern coast, from northern Somalia to southern Tanzania, east African merchants exchanged similar goods for date syrup from Persian traders, swords from Yemenis and carnelian beads from Indians.

Chinese pottery and Indian beads have been found as far inland as Great Zimbabwe – a stone city located in southern Zimbabwe that thrived between about 1100 and 1500 AD. Great Zimbabwe's residents obtained these treasures from east African merchants in exchange for gold, which was plentiful around Great Zimbabwe. Chinese silk also made it as far west as Mali, whose emperors had it woven into robes.

One-dimensional view

Given historical African societies' economic, political and cultural importance, why is so little of their history generally known? Quite simply, this is because of a tendency to focus



Carnelian beads, like the ones shown here, made their way from south Asia to east Africa across the Middle Ages

on narratives of slavery, colonisation, victimisation and dominance. In the UK, when we tell stories about African peoples or their history, either in the classroom or in documentaries, books, films and TV series, we cover largely the events of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. We talk and tell stories about European 'discovery' of the Americas, the Atlantic triangle, abolition, anti-African racism, European presence in Africa, colonial wars and the British empire.

In all of these narratives, the African is inevitably presented as a victim of superior European technology, economic might and military prowess. This, then, becomes our view of the African *throughout* history, and, arguably, even our view of Africans today. We assume that this relationship between Europe and Africa has always been the natural order of things, and we do little either to scrutinise, interrogate or contradict this view.

The truth is, our conversations about African history and culture lack nuance.

As far as the eras of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism are concerned, we don't question enough how and why they happened. To our minds, it is a simple story of dominance – European over African. We think that when the Europeans arrived in Africa, they almost immediately subdued its societies, imposed their rules and regulations and captured the poor, unwitting Africans whom they stuffed in slave ships and shipped off to the Americas. We think that in this scenario Africans had only two options: capitulate and trade slaves willingly or be destroyed. We don't consider for a moment African agency in these turning points in world history. If we dug a little bit deeper into the history of these events to look at things from the African perspective, we would see that in many places the scenario I've sketched out here wasn't what necessarily happened.

A war on slavery

Take 18th-century Dahomey (now Benin) and arguably its best king, Agaja, as an example. Born in c1673, Agaja was crowned in 1708. From the records we have of him, including those of an English Royal African Company agent called Bulfinch Lambe (who was forced to live with Agaja for three years), we know that Agaja was handsome, majestic, intelligent and an incomparable strategist and military commander.

In 1724 and 1727, Agaja invaded the nearby kingdoms of Allada and Whydah respectively. At the time, both of these kingdoms were the region's premier slave traders. Since the late 17th century, the Europeans in the region, including the Dutch, Portuguese, English and French, had had their slaving headquarters in one or both of these kingdoms. Annually, both Whydah and Allada 'exported' close to 20,000 enslaved Africans, mostly prisoners of war, those who'd committed crimes or broken

We think that Africans had only two options: capitulate and trade slaves willingly, or be destroyed

Keeping calm Azande traditional healers dance at a seance in the 1920s. Witchcraft helped maintain social harmony among this central African people, writes Luke Pepera



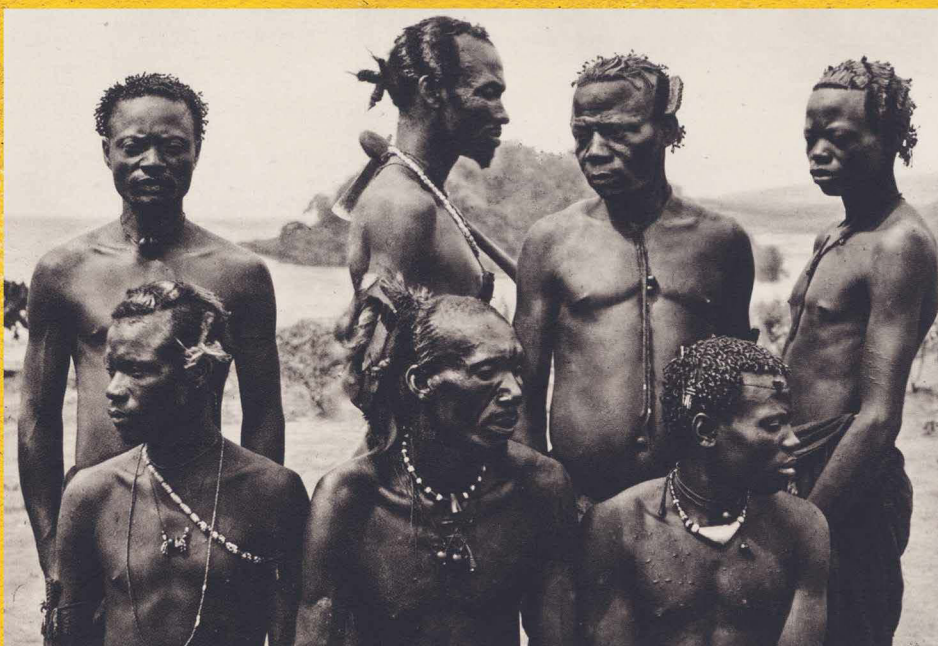
Highest new entry

A Ming dynasty painting of a giraffe. China's Yongle emperor imported this animal – as well as leopards and zebras – from what is now Kenya into Nanjing in the 15th century



An end to slavery

A memorial to formerly enslaved people in Ouidah, a port in the early modern kingdom of Whydah (now in Benin). Whydah was an active participant in the slave trade until Agaja, king of Dahomey, conquered it in 1727



Points of view Azande people in the Belgian Congo, in the late 19th/early 20th century. We can only present an accurate history of Africa if we look at things from the perspective of Africans themselves, says Luke Pepera

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咸化流行
福和萬邦
三光順序
百靈
虞至嘉禾生甘露
黃河清
破米溢諸
華臺
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Balance of power A stele showing Amanitore, queen of the Kingdom of Kush in the first century AD, preparing to smite enemies. According to Luke Pepera, African societies were more accepting of female rulers than their European counterparts

serious taboos. Some historians, such as Archibald Dalziel, who was not only a late 18th-century historian but also a slave trader who had spent significant time in both Whydah and Dahomey, argued that Agaja invaded Whydah and Allada because he wanted to take over their slave-trading infrastructures. However, Agaja immediately went about dismantling these structures, destroying ports, forts and castles almost with glee. He also showed little interest in preserving good relationships with the Europeans in Allada and Whydah. In fact, he took about 40 of them prisoner.

When he consolidated his control over Allada and Whydah, Agaja also did nothing to repair the slave-trading infrastructures he'd destroyed. Instead, he ordered his soldiers to stop slave-traders from bringing enslaved people to the coast. He also jailed Dahomeans who tried to sell enslaved people. When Europeans made to leave Allada and Whydah for kingdoms whose rulers were more hospitable to the idea of selling enslaved people, Agaja blocked them. The Europeans complained that trade dropped off a cliff and that they couldn't see it returning to its previous levels as long as Agaja remained in power.

What's more, any difficulty Agaja faced in holding on to power came not from Europeans, but largely from *other* great African kingdoms who, for one reason or another, disagreed with his policies. Oyo – a city-state of the Yoruba people in what's now Nigeria



Melting pot A market in Lagos, Nigeria. "Africans today are some of the most ethnically, culturally and racially diverse peoples on Earth"

GETTY IMAGES



– was one such rival. Its rulers felt that, in conquering neighbouring kingdoms, Agaja had contravened age-old customs that had for centuries governed the relationships between the coastal west African kingdoms. But stories like Agaja's, where the African *isn't* presented solely as an agency-less victim at the mercy of the Europeans with whom they dealt, are sorely missing from our conception and tellings of African history.

Complex cultures

Another way in which our understanding of African history lacks nuance is in a poor appreciation for the true breadth and depth of African history and culture. The earliest ancestor in the evolutionary line that produced our species, *Homo sapiens*, is said to be *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* ('Sahel man of Chad'), who lived in around that part of Africa 7 million years ago. Until the emergence of *Homo erectus* some 5 million years later, early humans lived *only* in Africa. What's crucial to remember is that *Sahelanthropus* wasn't the only early human being who inhabited the continent. There were lots of different groups of these hominids that probably migrated back and forth across it, lived in different areas, developed differently and then mixed with others, resulting in the emergence of plenty of new groups.

It is largely this deep history, diversity and mixing that means Africans today are some of the most ethnically, culturally and racially diverse peoples on Earth. Africans speak around a third of the world's 7,000 languages. Africa boasts the largest language group in the world – Niger-Congo – which contains around 1,500 languages spoken by more than 300 million people. Africa also boasts one of the oldest language groups in the world – Khoisan – whose 35 languages emerged from one that's said to have been spoken as far back as 20,000 years ago.

A misunderstanding of the depth and complexity of African cultures is often what led 19th-century European anthropologists to dismiss certain aspects of these cultures as nonsensical or unnecessary. One such aspect that comes to mind is witchcraft. Early European anthropologists saw it largely as a universal, superstitious belief system. They mostly didn't account for the differences in African peoples' witchcraft beliefs, nor could they conceive of the practical purposes these beliefs served.

For example, in the case of the Azande people of what's now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, witchcraft was about diffusing tensions and restoring social harmony. The Azande believed that you bewitched someone by feeling negatively towards them. In other words, if a Zande (the



A skull of the 'Sahel man of Chad', who lived 7 million years ago. It would be another 5 million years before early humans travelled from Africa

singular of Azande) was angry, hateful or resentful towards another person, they bewitched that person, causing them to suffer some kind of misfortune (falling ill, say). Therefore, when a Zande suffered a misfortune, they thought of someone with whom they had a problem. They then confronted that person, garnered sympathy by explaining what they'd been going through and asked for reconciliation. Customarily, the latter complied, and social harmony was restored.

Another aspect that comes to mind is African female leadership. To many European observers, this represented the inverse of their societies – one in which men dominated institutions and the public sphere, whereas women were often relegated to second-class citizens. In short, these African societies represented to them Amazonia. But this

wasn't really the case. In many female-led African societies, there was actually a *balance* of power between men and women.

From about 25 to 21 BC, the Nubians and the Romans (the latter under their first emperor, Augustus Caesar) were at war. Rome had conquered Egypt and northern Nubia. When the northern Nubians rebelled, their king, Teriteqas, and queen, Amanirenas, lent them the support of their royal army.

In Nubia, the king didn't have absolute authority. In various ways, he shared this authority with his mother (the queen mother) and his wife. The Nubians believed that duality and balance was the foundation of success in any sphere. This included in rulership, which required both male *and* female energies to function successfully.

It was not unusual then that when Teriteqas died in one of this war's early conflicts, Amanirenas succeeded him (their young son, Akinidad, was not yet elected king). She sacked Roman Egyptian cities, took prisoners and looted statues of Augustus, securing a victory for the Nubians and a favourable peace treaty from Augustus himself. She is the best known of the 'Kandakes', Nubian royal women who ruled Meröe (the last Nubian kingdom) nearly absolutely.

Gaps in the story

These stories represent just a fraction of the breadth, depth and nuance of African peoples' history and cultures. If we not only want to understand truly the African past but also fill in a significant gap in the story of our species, we need to consider the African perspective even when it comes to well-trodden areas of history like the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. We need to understand and present Africans and their history more accurately.

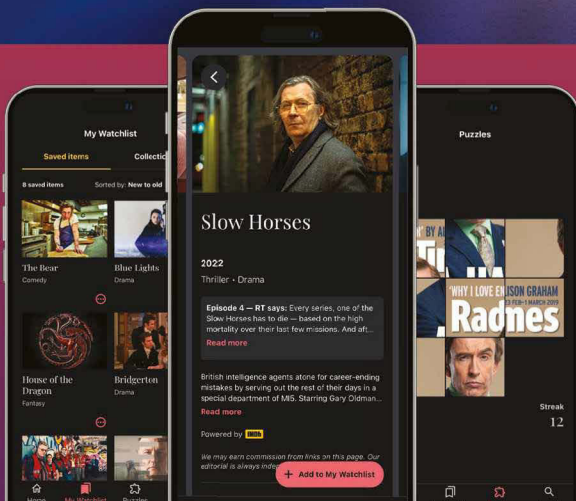
Africans haven't historically been only the enslaved or the conquered. We've been emperors, sculptors, merchants, architects and scholars. We've navigated our continent and the globe. We've created world-class architecture and art. We've innovated, leading academic, governmental and industrial institutions. *This* is some of the African history we need to see in books, documentaries, films and TV series. If we fail to explore this history, we do a disservice not just to Africans, but to peoples of other societies who otherwise come away with a woefully erroneous understanding of the peoples that have inhabited our world the longest. ■

Luke Pepera is a Ghanaian-born writer, broadcaster, historian and anthropologist. His new book, *Motherland: A Journey Through 500,000 Years of African History, Cultures and Identity*, is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in January

If we want to understand truly the African past, we need to consider the African perspective

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BOOKS

MEDIEVAL

“We read stories of miracles, war and politics”

Danièle Cybulskie lauds a study into monastic communities > page 76



GLOBAL

// At one point in the early 19th century, we are told, the project of creating a United States of South America seemed plausible //

Tamar Herzog considers an epic book on the forgotten paths of South American history > page 72

SOCIAL HISTORY

“The pub has always had its enemies as well as its friends, as the temperance movement demonstrates”

Craig Stafford distills a history of the pub and its place in British culture > page 74

LITERARY

“It’s surprising that over 50 years have passed since the previous English language biography was published”

Paul Cowdell welcomes a new study of the Brothers Grimm > page 77

INTERVIEW

Laurence Rees delves into the mentality behind the Third Reich > page 68



INTERVIEW / LAURENCE REES

“The idea that there’s a widespread movement to learn from history or to understand it meaningfully is false”

LAURENCE REES explains to Danny Bird how studying the history of the Nazi regime yields warnings – but that frighteningly few people are interested in learning from the past

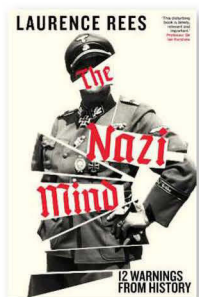
Danny Bird: The subtitle of your book is ‘Twelve Warnings from History’. What prompted you to write this now?

Laurence Rees: My interest has always been in mentalities: why people think the way they do, how they justify their actions, and what makes them believe they are right. This focus has shaped my career much more than, say, an interest in military history. Though I respect such pursuits, my background in documentary journalism has always pushed me toward understanding people’s decisions: why do people think what they do?

I’ve been fascinated by these questions since the 1990s. Over time I began delving deeper into psychology and neuroscience to better understand mentalities, particularly those of the Nazis. This new exploration wasn’t driven by a sense that the world needed my book; rather, it grew from a broader interest in the human condition. That condition remains relevant regardless of current events.

My 1997 BBC documentary *The Nazis: A Warning from History* drew on the German philosopher Karl Jaspers’ injunction: “That which has happened is a warning.” I’ve always been intrigued by the idea of history as a source of warnings, not lessons. Lessons suggest rigid rules – such as the claim that Churchill’s opposition to Hitler proves that appeasement is always wrong. Yet Churchill appeased Stalin, so are there in fact occasions where appeasement is permissible?

Warnings, however, are clearer. They function like a doctor’s advice that if you keep smoking, you’re more likely to develop lung cancer. It’s not a certainty, but it’s a valuable caution. This approach has guided my study of history – seeking warnings that can illuminate the human condition and help us navigate the present.



The Nazi Mind: 12 Warnings from History

by Laurence Rees
(Viking, 448 pages, £25)

When trying to understand the mentality of past eras, are eyewitness testimonies more helpful than archive research?

I wouldn’t say that one approach is necessarily more valuable than the other. Having started in television, I always wanted to make history documentaries. I never aspired to be an academic historian but was inspired by shows such as *The World at War* [1973].

In documentary-making, there’s a clear divide between talking to people who experienced events first-hand and dealing with the more distant past. That divide fascinates me. I’ve always been particularly interested in talking to people with direct connections to history.

One of the first films I made, many years ago, was about Rasputin. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, we were the first foreigners to visit his home village in western Siberia. There we met two incredibly old women who had known Rasputin as a young man. One of them vividly described him as a nightmare – always drunk. That kind of personal connection brings history to life in a way other sources can’t.

The Second World War holds a particular resonance for me. My father was in the RAF, and my uncle, whom I never met, was killed while serving on a convoy ship sunk by a U-boat. This gave me a visceral connection to that period. Over the years, I’ve talked to people who met Hitler, survivors of Auschwitz, and others with direct links to pivotal moments in history. That immediacy and connection makes the subject deeply compelling for me.

Though I wouldn’t claim that oral history is more important than other sources, it’s the excitement of those personal connections that drove me to dedicate 35 years to this work. But ultimately, as a historian, you’ve got to be sceptical about every source, haven’t you?

In the book, you recount a conversation with a former member of the Waffen-SS in the early 1990s. Can you tell us more?

While researching a documentary in Austria, I met someone who had served in the Waffen-SS and remained committed to the Nazi regime. It was my first encounter with someone like that – and it was extraordinary. After the war, he had become a senior executive at a German car company; he was retired when we met but still sharp and articulate.

When we discussed the war, he expressed shocking views: lamenting that Britain and Germany hadn’t teamed up to rule the world, blaming Winston Churchill for the conflict, praising the Third Reich as a “golden era”, and describing the Jews murdered during the Holocaust as a problem that had to be dealt with “one way or the other”. His perspective was a complete fantasy – a revisionist view of history.

What struck me was the duality: here was a successful businessman who seemed outwardly ordinary but still held such abhorrent beliefs. It challenged my assumptions about what a former committed Nazi might be like. He wasn’t monstrous in appearance or demeanour, yet his views were chilling. That encounter began a journey towards understanding how someone could maintain these beliefs even long after the war and the full exposure of its crimes.

Do you see parallels between the Nazi regime’s use of manipulation and entertainment as tools of power and that of present-day political movements?

Yes – all over the place. But in the book I’m careful not to say: “This is what X, Y or Z is doing.” That’s deliberate. The examples I use,



PROFILE

Laurence Rees is a historian, author and documentary film-maker whose BBC series have included *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997) and *Auschwitz: The Nazis and 'The Final Solution'* (2005)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAMIAN MCFADDEN

including Mao and Stalin, are historical figures whom you can clearly examine.

I did this for two reasons. First, I'm writing a history book occasionally informed by psychology, not a modern political treatise. I've spent years trying to understand the Second World War and the Nazis, and I'm still learning. Who am I to claim expertise on current political situations or to draw exact parallels?

Second, I believe it's more powerful if readers make those connections themselves. In my experience with films and books, it's more profound when someone reads something and thinks: "This reminds me of X or Y." Some readers have told me that the book made them think differently about modern events. That's more impactful than me spelling it out for them. My goal was to provide a framework – a set of templates – to help people think critically about the world today.

Your book contains a chilling chapter on how the Nazis targeted young people. What made young minds particularly susceptible to Nazi ideology?

I've loved working on this book, particularly because of what I've learned about neuroscience. One highlight was interviewing Professor Robert Sapolsky from Stanford – someone I've admired for years. His undergraduate lectures on neuroscience, available online, are brilliant, and I highly recommend them.

Sapolsky shared a fascinating insight that I hadn't considered before: targeting individuals under the age of 25 is enormously effective – something that dictators have understood well. This is because of how the brain develops, specifically the prefrontal cortex – the part responsible for impulse control and long-term reasoning. Until around the age of 25, this area isn't fully developed, which explains why younger people are more prone to risk-taking, idealism and even fanaticism.

Sapolsky illustrated this using the example of explaining social nuances to a young child – for instance, asking them to pretend to be surprised about receiving a duplicate gift they already own. The subtleties are often too complex for the young brain to compute. This immaturity in the prefrontal cortex also explains why younger people are more easily drawn to highly emotive causes, whether positive or destructive.

As Sapolsky puts it, those under 25 are in the ideal period of life for fostering fanaticism. It's when individuals are most likely to become either fascists or saints. This developmental window has been historically exploited by regimes ranging from the Nazis to Mao's during the Cultural Revolution, which relied heavily on student fervour.

How crucial was the support of the wider German population to the Nazi regime?

As early as 1933, Goebbels called for the "mobilisation of the mind". By this, he meant influencing the majority of Germans who hadn't voted for the Nazis. Even in the highly pressurised 1933 election, after Hitler became chancellor, a majority of Germans did not vote for them. It was only later, under the pressure of plebiscites and Nazi rule, that large numbers began voting in favour.

Goebbels understood the importance of winning over those who hadn't supported the Nazis, and worked to do so. After setbacks such as Stalingrad in 1943 and Mussolini's downfall in Italy, terror came to the forefront, and Goebbels noted approvingly in his diary how Himmler executed deserters and those who spoke out against the regime. But terror had

// Someone asked me if I was pleased with the impact of my work on the Nazis. I thought: are you kidding? Hardly anyone seems to take these warnings seriously //

limited success, and Goebbels believed it was less effective than fostering the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or 'people's community' – the idea that everyone was united in a shared national purpose as defined by the Nazis.

Following Germany's defeat in 1945, how did the leading Nazis attempt to rationalise the regime's crimes – and their own part in them?

The responses of individual Nazis to their actions varied. Some accepted responsibility, while others denied or deflected blame. A common excuse was ignorance: many claimed that they were unaware of the atrocities, believing that Auschwitz was merely a camp or that Jews were being sent east to work.

Another approach was deflection, akin to modern 'whataboutism'. When confronted with the Holocaust they voiced a series of blatantly false equivalences, such as the firebombing of Hamburg or colonial injustices, dismissing the charges as 'victor's justice'. This allowed them to label the Allies as hypocrites, reinforcing a belief in their victimhood.

This sense of hypocrisy was rooted in three key events that took place in 1938. First, Germany's annexation of Austria in March led to widespread persecution of Austrian Jews. Then, in November, Kristallnacht escalated antisemitic violence, including the destruction of synagogues, mass arrests and killings.

In between those events, in July, the Évian Conference exposed the international community's indifference. Convened by US president Franklin D Roosevelt to address the Jewish refugee crisis, it was largely symbolic, with countries offering little action. Hitler's reaction was to lambast democratic nations as hypocrites. He offered to help Jews leave Germany if other nations agreed to take them – but no country accepted his offer. This deepened Nazi contempt for the west, seeing it as morally duplicitous.

Psychological research shows that hypocrisy is often more reviled than outright dishonesty. And the Nazis invoked this global hypocrisy to justify their actions. After the war, many former Nazis clung to this narrative, framing themselves as victims of a hypocritical world order. That sentiment was also linked to colonialism. Nazis pointed to Britain and argued: "You condemn us for wanting an empire while refusing to relinquish your own."

That sense of double standards became a coping mechanism, allowing many to rationalise their complicity or continue justifying their actions long after the war ended. It allowed former Nazis to deflect responsibility and maintain a belief in their innocence despite the overwhelming evidence of their atrocities..



Young fanatics "You also belong to the Führer" declares a 1937 propaganda poster aimed at girls. The Nazis exploited the susceptibility of young minds



Revisit the Third Reich

Laurence Rees explores the Nazi regime in our new online course: historyextra.com/academy



Racist regime

A poster exhorting "Germans! Defend yourselves! Don't buy from Jews!" is pasted on a Jewish-owned shop in 1933. The Nazis were committed to antisemitic persecution from the moment they came to power

Did Allied prosecutors analyse the psychological motives behind Nazi leaders' actions and attempt to define a distinct 'Nazi personality type'?

Yes. [During the Nuremberg Trials] psychologists conducted Rorschach tests [using inkblots] with former Nazis. What stood out was how differently various psychologists interpreted the results. One concluded that the subjects were murderous SS 'robots', aligning with a view that some found comforting. Another disagreed, arguing that they were simply a collection of individuals, and couldn't be defined by such a reductive label.

Recent literature emphasises that, though culture shapes us as individuals, there's a vast range of personalities and behaviours within any group. It's overly simplistic to attribute robotic tendencies to human beings.

Returning to Karl Jaspers' warning to posterity, do you think that each new generation is truly capable of grasping this idea – especially as the Second World War recedes further into the distant past?

No, I don't believe they are. Someone once asked me if I was pleased with the impact of my work on *The Nazis: A Warning from History*. I thought: are you kidding? Hardly anyone seems to take these warnings seriously.

We have a massive problem in that most people in the UK stop studying history in their mid-teens. This creates a fundamentally historically illiterate population. Before I produced the documentary series *Auschwitz: The Nazis and 'The Final Solution'* in 2005, we conducted a poll. It revealed that most people didn't even know what the word 'Auschwitz' meant, let alone hold a view on it.

The idea that there's a widespread movement to learn from history or to understand it meaningfully is false. Only small numbers of people engage with it seriously. I've enjoyed doing this work, but I honestly don't know if it's done much good. I wish it were otherwise.

Even when people engage with history, it's often misrepresented – like the focus on Churchill standing against Hitler, while overlooking his willingness to forge an alliance with Stalin. During one interview I gave, someone said they felt more depressed after talking to me. I could only apologise!

Does focusing so much on Nazi Germany as a cautionary tale risk reducing it to a cliché, oversimplifying the complexities of how a society descended into authoritarianism and atrocities?

Yes – but the risk is in not studying it, because that is what leads to oversimplification. Don't you find that in life, as in history, it's easier to hold firm views about things before knowing much about them?

Years ago I interviewed Professor Akira Iriye, a Harvard expert in Japanese diplomatic history, for a Second World War educational website. I asked him about the value of studying that period, and he said that one worthwhile outcome would be to help politicians avoid making false comparisons.

Not understanding history risks reducing it to clichés, such as 'murderous Nazi robots'. For example, someone once dismissively said to me that the Nazis' atrocities were the result of how they had been swaddled as babies.

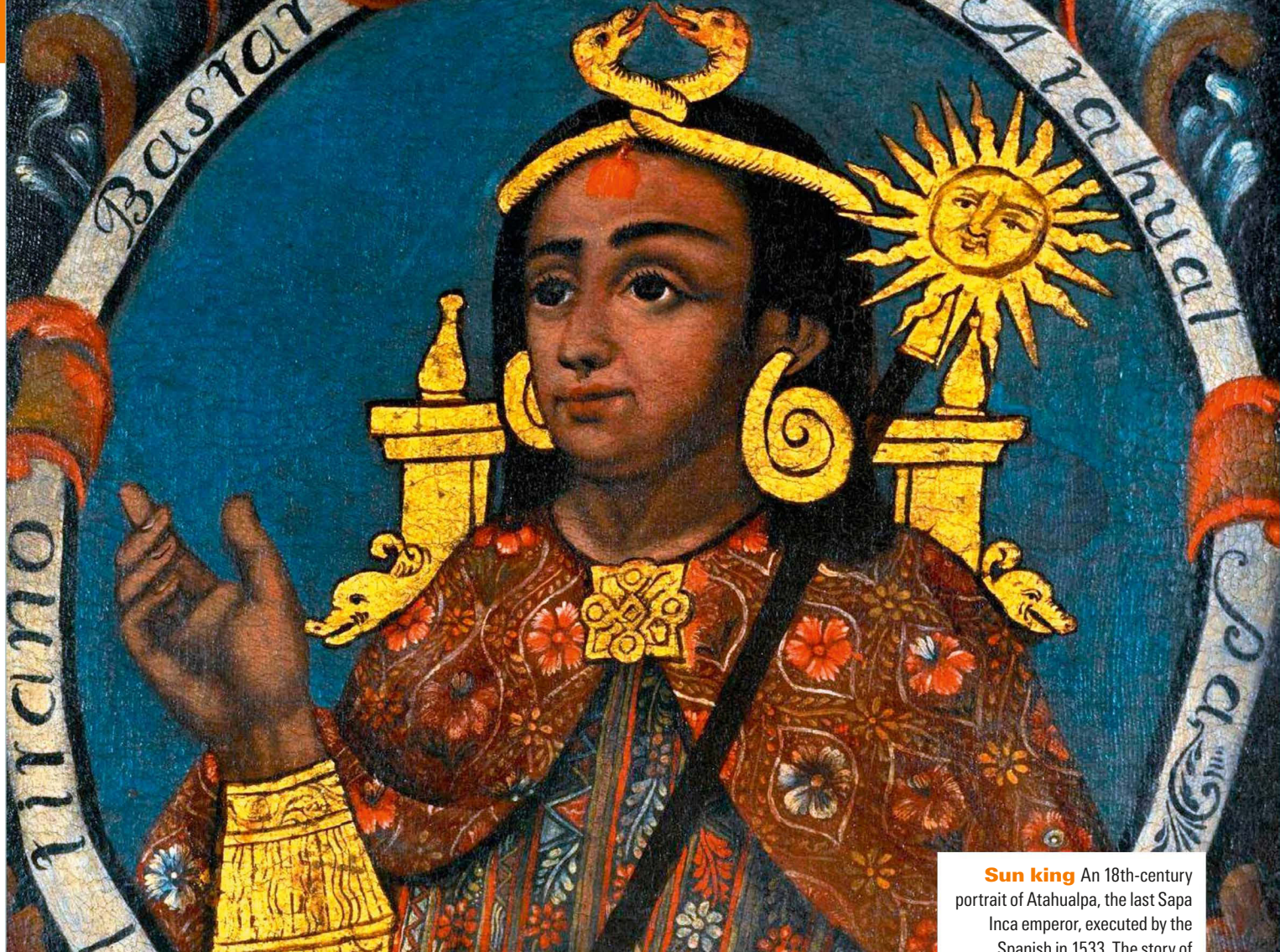
Do you think interrogating the unique context that shaped the mentality of a time and place are key when studying the past?

I believe the most important line I wrote in the book is also the simplest: we must accept that we are creatures of a particular time and place. This may seem self-evident but, in my experience, it's not. Many people say things like: "If I had been German, I would have stood up and spoken out."

This assumption shows a lack of understanding of a fundamental truth: our thoughts and actions are deeply shaped by our context – the time and place in which we live. The same applies to people of the past. To truly understand their actions, we must first understand their world.

I once met someone who rejected this notion. When I mentioned the Aztecs and their belief in human sacrifice as essential for ensuring rainfall, he claimed he'd have started the equivalent of Aztec Amnesty International, advocating for human rights.

I couldn't definitively say that he wouldn't have done it, but it seems unlikely. If you were raised in early 15th-century Mesoamerica, you would almost certainly have accepted human sacrifice as necessary. Recognising this helps us grasp the profound influence of culture and context on human behaviour. **H**

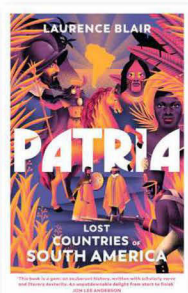


Sun king An 18th-century portrait of Atahualpa, the last Sapa Inca emperor, executed by the Spanish in 1533. The story of his successors in Vilcabamba is one of many rarely told tales shared in a new book

GLOBAL

A kaleidoscopic universe

TAMAR HERZOG enjoys an immersive journey across South America but feels that it leaves many questions unasked and unanswered



Patria: Lost Countries of South America

by Laurence Blair
Bodley Head, 448 pages, £25

In this extensive, well-researched and entertaining book, Laurence Blair leads us to and

through South America, present and past. Part travel narrative, part rumination on history and its legacies, the author proposes that we consider multiple stories that, though long known among professional historians, have not yet reached wider audiences.

Blair reveals, for example, that the Amazon is not a pristine wilderness untouched by humans but instead was modified by the millions of people who have lived there since time immemorial. And that, after the last Inca leader Atahualpa was captured and executed by Spanish Conquistadors in 1533, members of his family continued reigning in Vilcabamba (in present-day Peru) until they were defeated in the 1570s. We also hear that various indigenous groups resisted European encroachment well into the 19th and 20th centuries, and that enslaved people who escaped bondage built and governed their own communities, establishing complex polities.

At one point in the early 19th century, we are told, the project of creating a United

States of South America – one that would encompass all of the territories once colonised by Spain – seemed plausible. So did the notion of a large Paraguayan homeland, stretching far beyond the limits of the present-day state. Other seemingly achievable dreams were that Bolivia would retain its access to the ocean, and that a successful, rich and peaceful Venezuela might evolve.

What lies under the surface, sedimented so solidly that we no longer see it? Which memories have been silenced and must be awakened? Which wounds run too deep, and which can be healed? Do vestiges of the past matter? Does how we got here influence where we go next? These are among the questions addressed in Blair's book.

// Only by forgetting parts of the past can we admire kingdoms whose rulers might not have been more benign than conquering Spaniards //

Blair is mostly interested in how the vanquished rather than the victors – whether European invaders or rapacious Latin American neighbours – tell and re-tell stories of resistance, rebellion and revolutions. If German historian Reinhart Koselleck is right, what victors narrate is not history – it is propaganda. Koselleck suggested that, whereas victors celebrate the past uncritically, the vanquished take on the task of understanding why things transpired. Only the vanquished aspire to write a true history, because only they look to the past to unfold what otherwise is hidden from sight – as indicated by the etymology of the word ‘explaining’ (from the Latin *ex-plicare*, ‘unfold’).

Golden age mythology

The stories Blair tells are filled with nostalgia for a golden age of persistence in the face of colonialism, of liberty and autonomy despite enslavement, of unity despite divisions. As with all ‘golden age’ mythologies, what is remembered and how – and what is forgotten – informs the images produced. Blair’s insistence on surveying “what connects then and now” does not mask the evident fact that things have changed radically.

Blair’s initial proposition points to such an argument. He wants to juxtapose the present state of the continent with what it could have been. It is as if there was once a potential for great things – but that this potential never materialised. He cites someone telling him that Paraguay was, in the late 19th century, “the most advanced country in Latin America”. If that was the case, then why, when and how was this potential ‘wasted’? And what happened to the rest of the South American continent – which, according to historians, was far more advanced than the US in the early 19th century, but now seems to lag behind in some important ways?

The author passes up many opportunities to ask important questions. Why do some Latin Americans – in this book Paraguayans and Venezuelans, though the same is true also for Mexicans and Argentinians – treat various former presidents as martyrs, keeping their relics and body parts or leaving plaques of gratitude next to their statues? Why are only some people ‘patriots’, whereas others – who might have held different opinions but still cared greatly for their community – are not?

At different stages in this story, too, who are the locals and who are the foreigners? For example, Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1616), a colonial author of mixed heritage born in Peru, ended up in the Spanish city of Granada fighting against local rebels. Meanwhile, Spanish colonial armies were made up of more native people than Europeans.

Blair is right that Latin America matters – and matters enormously – for what it was, for what it is, and for what it will become. Its history is an important part of a universal heritage and, as such, it pertains to all of us, regardless of who we are and where we live. Yet whether the forgotten stories Blair uncovers allow us to change the way we view the continent, as the celebrated Colombian novelist and Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez desired, is unclear.

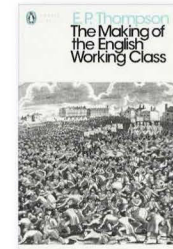
It is perhaps true that stories such as that of Vilcabamba, the last Inca kingdom that persisted for decades after the conquest, deserves to be told. However, the important question is how memories of the past are formed, maintained and used. It is not for nothing that, during the early modern period, Spaniards who wanted to change the ways, beliefs and practices of the indigenous peoples constantly argued that a true conversion – a real change of heart – requires changing not only the present and the future but also the past.

Only by forgetting parts of the past can we admire kingdoms whose rulers might not have been more benign than the conquering Spaniards. Only by selectively choosing what to remember can we imagine that Argentina, a country where a huge number of African-descent individuals lived, is a place inhabited only by white individuals. In other words, what we choose to remember and what we allegedly (or truly) forget matters, no less than what we see or don’t see today.

Blair’s book successfully transports us to a kaleidoscopic and fascinating universe that is foreign yet familiar. It supplies us with precious information, but leaves many questions unanswered. **H**

Tamar Herzog is Monroe Gutman professor of Latin American affairs at Harvard University

Laura Beers on a groundbreaking study of social change in England



The Making of the English Working Class
by EP Thompson
(Victor Gollancz, 1963)

This isn’t a light read, clocking in at 864 densely printed pages. But it’s worth the investment. It’s a history of the late 18th and early 19th centuries in England – decades defined by the upheavals of the French and industrial revolutions – as told from the perspective of the printers, weavers and other assorted artisans who lived through those tumultuous events.

Thompson argues that, under the influence of the writings of Thomas Paine and the autodidact culture of Methodism, and in reaction to technological change and government repression, these artisans gained a new sense of their relationship to the social structure in the early 19th century, becoming conscious of themselves as a working class. It was through this emergent consciousness, and not as an *a priori* consequence of their socioeconomic position, that the English working class was made.

This book revolutionised my thinking about class, which I had previously taken as a fixed category, akin to age, sex or race – the latter two of which I’ve also grown to see as less-than-stable categories.

The Making has been criticised for its almost exclusive focus on working men, with women appearing in the book only as irrational agents – the millenarian prophet Joanna Southcott, for example – or bit players. Yet feminist scholars, as well as scholars of race and empire, recognise its foundational importance in foregrounding the agency of forgotten and too-often discounted actors in history. **H**

Laura Beers is the author of *Orwell’s Ghosts: Wisdom and Warnings for the 21st Century* (Hurst, 2024)

SOCIAL

Time at the bar

CRAIG STAFFORD enjoys an intoxicating jaunt through many centuries of pub culture, exploring the changing face of a true British institution



Pub
by Philip Howell
Bloomsbury, 160 pages,
£9.99

What makes a pub a pub? In this entertaining – even humorous – account, historical geographer Philip

Howell endeavours to answer this question, probing the many factors that define ‘pub-land’. It’s a historical study, but also one that examines the contemporary nature of the English pub, the characters who inhabit it and the shared experiences of customers.

Howell divides his book into five chapters, exploring the various elements he feels give a sense of ‘pub-ness’. The first discusses how breweries have enticed customers by way of architecture, signage and even, with the advent of the motor car, by providing parking spaces, sparking debate about the association of the pub – and alcohol – with driving.

The second chapter highlights the development of the bar area and of the people behind it, particularly barmaids and landlords. The challenges of getting served are discussed, whether created by barriers thrown up by the layout of the bar or by recalcitrant staff. The changing nature of alcohol consumed in pubs is also explored, its history as complex as that of the pub itself.

Chapter three discusses the internal architecture of pubs, and their portrayal for many years as male-only spaces. Antagonism towards female customers, and the belief that women drinking alone or for too long were engaged in prostitution, sat paradoxically adjacent to the ‘glamorous’ presence of women behind the bar. Howell then looks at how pubs utilised bar games and, more recently, televised football matches to keep patrons drinking. Finally, in the fifth chapter, he reflects on the role of the pub today, and casts an eye over its future.

In exploring these aspects of the institution and the building, Howell highlights the complicated nature of the pub and its changing place in the English landscape. He depicts it as not one but a series of establishments, from the medieval inn to the early modern tavern



Woolly head Peter the sheep guzzles ale at a bar in 1952. The architecture, ambience and clientele of pubs have changed dramatically over the centuries, yet a sense of ‘pub-ness’ remains, argues Philip Howell

// The names of some pubs denote historical associations with slavery or bloodsports – the Dog and Duck, for example //

and the Victorian gin palace, and on to its various present-day incarnations.

Bringing contradictions to the fore, he notes how a pub can be a place of fun and relaxation, but also highlights its darker side. The names of some pubs denote historical associations with slavery or bloodsports – the Dog and Duck, for example. Moreover, woe

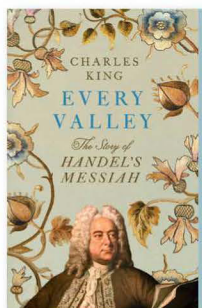
betide the drinker who walks into the ‘wrong’ section of a strange local, or the working-class Victorian woman who sought refreshment in a nearby hostelry. The respectability, or otherwise, of public drinking – such a problem for well-to-do Victorians – highlights just one of the issues with which the pub has been associated. Indeed, the pub has always had its enemies as well as its friends, as the rise of the temperance movement in the 19th century demonstrates.

This is a study of reinvention – of an institution that has changed over time, yet still possesses common characteristics with its predecessors. The pub remains, despite many trials and tribulations over the centuries, very much part of the landscape. **H**

Craig Stafford is a lecturer in history at the University of Liverpool

Settling scores

DAVID VICKERS appraises an imaginative if sometimes uneven account of Handel's popular masterpiece



Every Valley: The Story of Handel's Messiah

by Charles King

Bodley Head, 352 pages, £25

More ink has been spilt about *Messiah* than any of Handel's other works. Most authors

rehash old chestnuts of dodgy provenance about its rapid initial composition (1741) and Dublin premiere (1742) that, albeit appealing or entertaining, were debunked by scholars long ago. Often unreliable perceptions betray insufficient understanding of Handel's complex career, his prodigious musical output across many genres, and crucial documentary evidence.

Though neither a Handel specialist nor a trained historical musicologist, Charles King's generous acknowledgements and extensive bibliography indicate that he researched the subject diligently. His structure, divided into three parts ('Portents', 'Sorrows and Grief' and 'Resurrection'), echoes the organisation of the libretto, which is itself included as an appendix, reproducing the content and typography of the printed wordbook that was corrected in 1743 under the supervision of librettist Charles Jennens.

King's story weaves together five parallel plots with imagination, enthusiasm and erudition. Copious digressions into dynastic, political, philosophical, military and literary history yield rewarding contextual perspectives on late 17th and early 18th-century Britain. There are engaging thumbnail appraisals of the Glorious Revolution, the 1701 Act of Settlement (that ensured the Hanoverian succession) and Jacobite rebellions. Other tangents are the chauvinistic subjugation of women in Georgian society, the cruel exploitation carried out in pursuit of empire and colonialism (especially transatlantic slave trading), and the works of Swift, Pope, Locke, Hobbes and Leibniz.

King also discusses the intricate web of connections between numerous characters – notably mercantile, political and social links between members of different families from dissimilar classes – and spots correlations

between secondary figures that few others will have noticed. A vital element of the intricate tale is Captain Thomas Coram's establishment of the Foundling Hospital. Other recurring subplots have less relevance, though, such as the African Muslim Ayuba Diallo's period of slavery in Maryland and celebrity in London, the purchase of his freedom and his return home to Bundu (in what's now Senegal).

King achieves a persuasive balance between scholastic enquiry and an immediacy of conversational prose style. Alas, misconceptions and errors proliferate when it comes to dealing with Handel, his music and musicians. For example, he makes an unsound presumption that the alto soloist Susannah Cibber could not read musical notation, and he is wrong that she appeared in Handel's first run of the oratorio *Deborah* (1733). When we eventually arrive at the musical content of *Messiah*, there is not much insight apart from effusive descriptions of a few well-known choruses and a handful of arias.

Overall, though, Charles King's broad brushstrokes paint a vivid picture on a large canvas – even if, on closer inspection, the fine details are smudged. **H**

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David Vickers is a lecturer at the Royal Northern College of Music



Portrait of the artiste Handel in the 1720s, perhaps 15 years before he composed his *Messiah*

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Comrades in conflict

Former soldier **Barney Campbell** discusses *The Fires of Gallipoli*, his novel about wartime friendship



What inspired you to explore the impact of war on friendship?

The Gallipoli campaign, with its colossal ambition and sweeping drama, provides a great backdrop to the close friendship between two young officers caught up in the fighting, which is the heart of the book. I also wanted to show that, though war is obviously dreadful, some good can come from it, like the creation of deep and lasting bonds of friendship.

How did you approach depicting the historical experiences of Gallipoli?

I researched strategic and tactical aspects of the campaign, the personalities involved and the day-to-day experiences of the combatants. I was then able to spin my own story over that background, combining the two to create a narrative that is vivid and affecting enough to keep the reader's attention.

What makes war such a compelling subject for historical fiction authors?

I think the experience of war, and the range and depth of emotions it inspires, mean that people living through it form bonds more quickly and more intensely than in normal life. This gives authors enormous scope for exploring characters and the momentous choices that they might make in a given situation.

How do you think the trauma of war shapes relationships and identities after the conflict ends?

On a personal level, it depends entirely on the individual. Of my comrades from the war in Afghanistan, though some will be changed forever by it, many others are not. The same is true for countries. Gallipoli, for instance, has largely dropped from the UK's national memory, whereas that campaign remains far more deeply woven into the fabric of the national identities of Turkey, Australia and New Zealand.

The Fires of Gallipoli

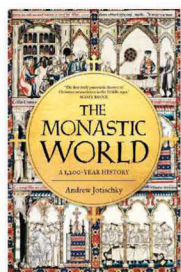
by Barney Campbell

Elliott & Thompson, 320 pages, £18.99

MEDIEVAL

Past orders

DANIÈLE CYBULSKIE praises a deep dive into the diverse monastic communities and traditions of the Middle Ages



**The Monastic World:
A 1,200-Year History**
by Andrew Jotischky

Yale University Press,
432 pages, £25

Monasteries were powerful organisations within the medieval world, serving as landholders, educators and spiritual leaders. And while all monks worked, prayed and devoted themselves to God, the ways in which they did so varied greatly from place to place over the thousand years or so that we refer to as the Middle Ages.

Andrew Jotischky's new book seeks to broaden our understanding of monks beyond the practices of western Europe, widening the lens to include the eremitical Desert Fathers of Egypt as well as monks who lived in wilderness, cliff-side caves or stone enclosures from Syria and Palestine to Britain and Ireland.

In his exploration of both Latin and Orthodox traditions, Jotischky also takes time to expand on the ways in which nuns practiced their own spirituality in community with, or separate from, their male counterparts, consciously ensuring that the many women who contributed to monastic history aren't left out of the narrative.

Referring to Rules of specific orders, *typika* (Byzantine foundational documents) and saints' lives, Jotischky lays out the many differences between monastic practices and belief systems – differences that may seem small to modern eyes, but which were causes of strife, schism and even, occasionally, murder within these pious communities. The tension between monks' obligations (and often predilections) in the outside world and their commitment to God often led them to seek an original or 'best' practice, and to experiment both with asceticism and with care-giving within the greater community.

The Monastic World gives us a view of the more-familiar traditional Benedictine practices alongside more-radical and lesser-known examples – abbots who ruled from pillars, and holy fools who might go so far as to wander naked through city streets in their extreme rejection of the world. We also read stories of miracles, war and politics, as well

as accounts of men and women who wielded tremendous power both behind the walls of the monastery and within the highest courts of the era.

Readers will find here the usual holy suspects in the form of thinkers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter the Venerable – men whose influence on the medieval world can't be overstated. What's purposefully excluded from this history, in the interests of keeping a manageable scope, are military orders, mendicant friars and anchorites. So, while

readers can enjoy deep dives into Saints Benedict and Bernard, they won't find extensive passages on the missions of the followers of Saints Francis and Dominic.

Mainly chronological in structure, but with extensive asides and explanations, *The Monastic World* is exactly what it says it is: a history of monasticism, not a primer on the subject. Given the scope of his project – both temporally and geographically – Jotischky cannot possibly cover all things from ground zero. As a result, this book would not be a comfortable fit for the absolute beginner to the Christian Middle Ages or to monasticism in general. Rather, its fine and erudite detail is better suited to the next level up: those who are somewhat familiar with the idea of monks, ecclesiastical hierarchy and medieval Christian teachings broadly. For those readers, Jotischky's deep expertise, his emphasis on giving eastern monastic traditions their due and his careful examination of the nuance between practices will be richly rewarding. **H**

Danièle Cybulskie is a historian, podcaster and author. Her latest book is *Chivalry and Courtesy: Medieval Manners for a Modern World* (Abbeville Press, 2023)

// Differences between monastic practices and belief systems were causes of strife, schism and even, occasionally, murder //



On song Nuns in choir stalls, pictured in an early 15th-century psalter illustration. A new history of medieval monasticism ensures that women aren't excluded from the narrative

MEDIA

Winds of change



The Shipping Forecast: Celebrating 100 Years

by Meg Clothier

BBC Books, 224 pages, £16.99

The BBC's archives reveal one senior insider describing the shipping forecast as "an unwelcome intrusion". And in a closing chapter of her new book, author Meg Clothier imagines a BBC Radio 4 figure as a philistine, opining: "The Shipping Forecast isn't a *poem*, it's a *weather bulletin*." Yet most Radio 4 announcers would disagree. "It's not just a question of reading a list of words," one said. "You really have to let it flow through you." It's her voice, her rhythms of speech, that burnish raw data into blank verse – something she embraces.

The forecast's daily incantations are here a "slipway" to an extended meditation on seafaring and weather. A classicist by training, Clothier steers us briskly and confidently through the musings of writers and musicians ranging from Horace, Tennyson and Shelley through to Carol Anne Duffy, Gwenno and Blur – all of whom have interesting things to say about our relationship with the capricious and sometimes otherworldly waters that surround our island nation.



Stormy relationship Waves lash the Eddystone Lighthouse in a 19th-century lithograph. Meg Clothier's new book on the BBC's shipping forecast muses on aspects of Britain's history and its relationship with the weather

She has fun with the history, too: the Norman invaders, the Spanish Armada, D-Day. The breezy style occasionally escapes its moorings, perhaps becoming a touch too relentlessly jokey – though her account of the 1953 floods that swamped eastern England is restrained, compelling and moving.

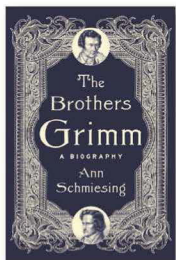
Indeed, there's an underlying seriousness to the writing. Clothier's book is sold as a

centenary celebration. But if that oversells its relationship to the programme itself, it also undersells the important things it has to say – about the crises facing fishing communities, the catastrophe of climate breakdown, and the foolishness of treating our island as a fixed and impermeable ethnic territory. **H**

David Hendy, author of *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

FOLKLORE

Telling tales



The Brothers Grimm: A Biography

Ann Schmiesing

Yale University Press, 360 pages, £25

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are best known for their collection of fairy

tales, first published in 1812. But that was only part of their work. Their research in philology, mythology, legends, medieval literature and lexicography directly and indirectly shaped the entire discipline of folklore. So it's surprising that more than 50 years have passed since the previous English-language biography was published.

Ann Schmiesing has bridged that lacuna in fine and comprehensive style. Her highly

readable survey covers the full range of the brothers' brilliant intellectual work, setting it well in its historical context.

Jacob and Wilhelm were the eldest of the six surviving children of a magistrate in Hessen, a state within the Holy Roman Empire. Schmiesing conveys well their personal closeness, broader family bonds and personalities – serious but clearly not humourless. One portrait hid the difference in their heights by depicting Jacob standing behind his seated brother; Jacob complained that the picture made them look like a patient and his carer.

Their lives were directly touched by the unfolding political situation. They saw the Napoleonic Wars and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the French occupation of Hessen and its aftermath. Indeed, Jacob was librarian to Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon's king of Westphalia, and acted as delegate to the Congress of Vienna following the French emperor's

downfall. In 1837, they were among the 'Göttingen Seven' professors dismissed for refusing to take an oath of allegiance to the king of Hanover in protest at his annulment of the Hanoverian constitution.

Their fascination with local and vernacular culture was informed by wider German Romantic thinking on language, people and nation – critical issues when Germany was not yet one nation. Schmiesing is usefully clear on this point and its traces in their work, without skirting around its more troubling aspects. She documents, for example, instances of antisemitism in their writing, informing consideration of German Romanticism's later degeneration.

Folklorists and fairy-tale scholars need to read this book, certainly, but it also deserves wider attention from anyone interested in the intellectual cultures of the period. **H**

Paul Cowdell, research fellow at the University of Hertfordshire

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By Jonathan Wright and Danny Bird
HISTORY COOKBOOK Viking mussels
EXPLORE Highgate Cemetery, London
HISTORIC CITIES Mexico City, Mexico

LEFT TO RIGHT: Young Cassandra Austen (Synnøve Karlsen) with her mother (Phyllis Logan) and younger sister Jane (Patsy Ferran) in a new BBC One drama exploring the fate of the author's letters



BBC



TV

Private words

Set largely in 1830, *Miss Austen* is concerned not with Jane, born 250 years ago this year, but with her elder sister, Cassandra (1773–1845). Based on Gill Hornby's novel, it's a story with a genuine literary mystery at its heart: why did Cassandra burn so many of Jane's letters?

Keeley Hawes stars as the adult Cassandra, whom we first meet as she heads off to visit Isabella (Rose Leslie), her long-dead fiancé's niece. Isabella is about to lose her home, but Cassandra isn't just visiting to help out and offer assistance. She wants to locate a hidden cache of letters that she fears could destroy Jane's reputation if made public.

Miss Austen

BBC One / February



What's on this week?

Visit [historyextra.com](https://www.historyextra.com) for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes



EXHIBITIONS

Iconic: Portraiture from Francis Bacon to Andy Warhol

Holburne Museum, Bath / 24 January–5 May / holburne.org

Showcasing 20th-century portraiture by artists such as Francis Bacon, Andy Warhol and Peter Blake, and including rarely seen pieces, this exhibition explores how their work was inspired by photography. The displays reflect on identity, fame, nostalgia and the passage of time through a unique cultural lens.

Making Egypt

Young V&A, Bethnal Green, London / 15 February–2 November / vam.ac.uk

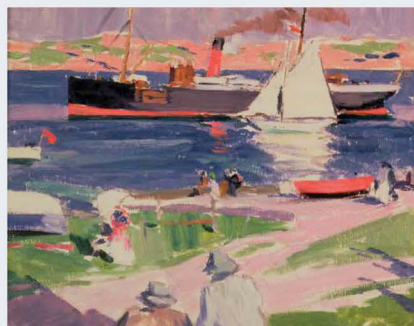
Explore ancient Egypt as never before at Young V&A this month.

The exhibition roams 5,500 years of creativity through diverse displays of design, fashion, comics and film, alongside historic treasures and contemporary artworks such as the 'Nu' shabti (left) by Zahed Tajeddin. Young visitors are encouraged to delve into Egypt's epic myths, crack the mystery of hieroglyphs and learn how to replicate the civilisation's art techniques through interactive hands-on activities.

**The Scottish Colourists: Radical Perspectives**

7 February–28 June / Dovecot, Edinburgh / dovecotstudios.com

The Scottish Colourists were renowned for their bold use of colour and innovative techniques. This month some of their greatest masterpieces are on show at Dovecot, including celebrated works by SJ Peploe, FCB Cadell, GL Hunter and JD Fergusson. They provide a fascinating insight into early 20th-century Scottish art and its links to contemporaries such as Henri Matisse and Bloomsbury doyenne Vanessa Bell. **H**



The Dunara Castle at Iona (c1929) by FCB Cadell, one of the quartet dubbed the Scottish Colourists



Lamorne Morris plays comedian Garrett Morris in *Saturday Night*, dramatising SNL's debut 1975 show

FILM

Funny business

Despite periodically becoming mired in controversy, NBC's satirical sketch show *Saturday Night Live* has become an American cultural institution. The fact that it's about to celebrate its 50th anniversary is all the more remarkable when you consider the volatility of so many of those involved in its launch in 1975, including the prodigiously talented yet infamously self-destructive John Belushi.

Comedy-drama *Saturday Night* tells the story of the show's first-ever episode – which, if the new film is to be believed, was at significant risk of being pulled from television schedules at the last moment. Gabriel LaBelle leads an ensemble cast as stressed-out *SNL* creator Lorne Michaels.

Saturday Night

In cinemas from Friday 31 January



A new miniseries explores the international fallout after a Soviet nuclear sub ran aground on the Swedish coast

TV

Stormy waters

It's a Cold War story that defies belief. In October 1981, a Whiskey-class submarine of the Soviet Union's Baltic fleet ran aground on the Swedish coast. Did it come to grief during a spying mission? Or did its navigator, possibly under the influence of booze, make a catastrophic error? To this day, nobody seems too sure what went wrong.

A new political satire – which makes much of neutral Sweden's sleepiness at that point

in time – explores how the incident inevitably led to tensions between the USSR and the US. The miniseries stars Rolf Lassgård as Sweden's leader, Thorbjörn Fälldin, a former sheep farmer who unexpectedly found himself having to deal with both Leonid Brezhnev and Ronald Reagan.

Whiskey on the Rocks

Disney+ / Wednesday 22 January



Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, subject of a new documentary, shows a photo of herself playing the cello before she was deported to Auschwitz

TV

Survivor's story

Eighty years ago, on 27 January 1945, the Soviet Red Army entered the gates of Auschwitz. There they found stacks of frozen corpses and, in the camp's barracks, 7,000 emaciated and exhausted prisoners. The Nazis killed more than a million people at Auschwitz, but there were at least a few who lived to tell of their experiences.

These included Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, the subject of a documentary broadcast for

Holocaust Memorial Day. She survived in large part because of her talent as a cellist. Today, aged 99, she is the last living member of the Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, whose duties included playing concerts for the SS. Later she was taken to Bergen-Belsen, liberated by the British in April 1945.

The Last Musician of Auschwitz

BBC Two / Monday 27 January

FILM

Broadcast news

In the digital age, we are used to the idea of a major story playing out on our screens in real time. But that wasn't the case in 1972 when, with the world looking on, terrorists from the Palestinian Black September group targeted Israeli athletes competing at the Munich Olympics.

New film *September 5*, starring Peter Sarsgaard, revisits the ensuing hostage crisis from the perspective of those working for ABC TV's sports division – men and women who suddenly find themselves responsible for broadcasting the latest updates from an unfolding crisis live to the world. It's both a huge scoop and, the broadcasters gradually realise, a terrible responsibility. Could their output be influencing events? **B**

September 5

In cinemas from Thursday 6 February



An American sports-reporting team has to rapidly adapt to a new role as a news outfit during the 1972 Munich hostage crisis, in new film *September 5*

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Power plays

In 1984, the former actor and California governor Ronald Reagan was re-elected as American president. His 'Morning in America' campaign was strikingly sunny and optimistic. But 40 years after Reagan's second inauguration, we have entered a darker political era. So what does the MAGA rhetoric of Donald J Trump owe to the legacy of Reagan and what he did to America? Historian Phil Tinline considers this question in

Archive on Four: Ronald vs Donald (BBC Sounds, available now).

The title of **Archive on 4: John Simpson's Dictators** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 8 February)

could hardly be clearer. It joins the veteran journalist and world affairs editor at BBC News as he recounts his many meetings with autocrats down the years. What is it, he asks, that drives dictators to grab and accumulate power for themselves?

With its mix of first-hand testimony and unexpected story choices, **Witness History** (BBC World Service) is consistently one of the most fascinating shows in the schedules. Head to BBC Sounds for an interview with Prospero Bailey, son of Jim Bailey, founder of *Drum*, widely considered to be the first African lifestyle magazine.

Other programmes in the strand revisit events like the creation of *Dungeons & Dragons* (BBC Radio 4, Sunday 26 January) and the Milltown Cemetery attack, when loyalist paramilitary Michael Stone targeted a funeral for three IRA men who had been shot dead in Gibraltar by members of the SAS (BBC World Service, Monday 27 January).

Broadcast to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, **The Documentary: Songs from Auschwitz** (BBC World Service, Thursday 23 January) joins Professor Shirli Gilbert exploring the life of Krystyna Żywulska, who created extraordinary poetry and music while imprisoned at Auschwitz.

New dramas on BBC Radio 4 include **Margaret White and the Alcoran of Mahomet** (Tuesday 21 January), telling the story of the first publication of the Qur'an in the UK, and **When Alan Met Ray** (Tuesday 11 February), about the first meeting between comedy writers Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, creators of *Steptoe and Son*. **B**



RECIPE

Viking mussels

ELEANOR BARNETT digs into archaeological research to recreate a Viking-cum-Anglo-Saxon seafood dish from medieval York

On our food history journey, we've tried numerous dishes based on recipes written down as far back as 2,000 years ago. When it comes to Viking-era cookery, however, we're not so lucky – at that time there was no equivalent of the ancient Roman Apicius, the Victorian domestic goddess Mrs Beeton, or Delia Smith today. To recreate some of the foods that Vikings would have eaten, historians instead have to rely on archaeological remains – animal bones, fruit seeds, grain husks, even faeces – alongside inspiration from later recipes and references in literature.

We're all familiar with the image of tattooed Scandinavians gulping down copious amounts of mead from a drinking horn and feasting from platters of roasted meat and game. But that kind of indulgence happened only on special occasions. Ordinary people would have eaten a lot of simple but hearty dishes including porridge, meat and fish stews, cheeses and soured dairy products such as *skyr*, which tastes like a mild-flavoured yoghurt and is still enjoyed today in Iceland.



Archaeological evidence reveals that Vikings in York ate shellfish including mussels, here cooked in a simple ale broth

Meat was often preserved by drying and salting to last through the months of winter and spring. Vegetables such as spring onions (scallions), leeks, carrots, beans and peas were grown where possible, and wild herbs were used for flavouring. Nuts and berries were scavenged from woodlands when in season.

Most food was cooked by boiling in a big cauldron over a fire in the centre of the home. It was eaten with a spoon carved from animal bone or wood, and perhaps served with a slice of bread made from wheat, barley or rye.

This month's recipe is based on the work of Daniel Serra and Hanna Tunberg, and also inspired by archaeological research at York – Jorvik, as it was known after AD 866 when it was under Viking rule until being integrated into England after the Norman conquest. Here, uniquely, Scandinavian traditions merged with Anglo-Saxon cuisine.

Unlike in other areas in the Viking world, archaeologists have found plenty of evidence that oysters, cockles and mussels were eaten in York. This recipe cooks them in a simple stew of ale (ideally, use a variety with minimal or no hops, which were not used in Viking brewing) incorporating vegetables and herbs that we know were available at the time. It is fresh, healthy and full of flavour. Best of all, it takes just half an hour to prepare and cook – and to reconnect with forebears who lived more than 1,000 years ago! **H**

An illustration shows Vikings preparing food, which tended to be simple but hearty



Serves: 4
Difficulty: 1/10
Time taken: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1kg fresh mussels
60g salted butter
1 leek
1 bulb fennel
4 cloves of garlic, minced
500ml ale
Fresh dill to garnish

METHOD

1. Scrub the mussels.
2. Melt the butter in a pot.
3. Chop the leek and fennel, add to the butter and cook on a medium heat for around 5 minutes until translucent.
4. Add the ale and bring to the boil.
5. Add the mussels and put the lid on the pot. Simmer for 5–10 minutes until the mussels open, stirring once or twice and discarding any mussels that don't open after this time.
6. Add chopped dill to garnish, and serve at once.



Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo) is out now



IH
PODCAST



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2023 WINNER



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Library of the dead

Highgate Cemetery, created as a fashionable resting place for wealthy Victorian dead, is a veritable who's who of London's great and good.

PETER ROSS roams the avenues of this most atmospheric necropolis

ENCOUNTERS EXPLORE

Highgate Cemetery isn't *in* London – it *is* London. It stands for the city in its splendour, its tangible history and, most of all, because it is a place of story. Some of the capital's most dramatic lives have their full-stops here.

You might, for example, follow the example of many visitors and head straight to the east part of the cemetery and the tomb of Karl Marx, with its great leonine bust (left). Or you could follow a winding path into the trees through the western side and seek the grave of Lizzie Siddal, the artist and model whom John Everett Millais painted as the drowned Ophelia, and who died in

1862, aged just 32. When she was exhumed seven years later so that her husband, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, could retrieve a book of poems he wished to publish, the coffin was, it is said, full of her beautiful red hair – it had continued to grow after death and glowed in copper coils by the light of a graveside fire.

That fairytale detail suits Highgate. It is a deeply atmospheric place that, even on a warm day, can provoke a shiver. It opened in the spring of 1839, the third of the 'Magnificent Seven' cemeteries encircling London. These grand 19th-century necropolises met a practical need: the hygienic disposal of the dead, replacing overflowing and pestilent city churchyards. But such "great gardens of death" were intended to be more than pragmatic – they were quite consciously made beautiful: laid out like parks studded with impressive and expensive tombs and

chapels. As a bereaved Victorian, you could promenade in your best mourning clothes, saying a prayer at the grave of your lost loved one, demonstrating the depth of your grief, your faith – and your pockets.

The modern visitor to Highgate faces a choice: which side to visit first? The east cemetery has the graves of Marx and George Eliot along with some more unusual modern headstones. One such commemorates Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols' manager, whose memorial includes a death mask set below a shield bearing his initials. The west cemetery has the most striking architecture – in particular, the Egyptian Avenue leading to the Circle of Lebanon. These are really nothing more than a series of private vaults, but designed with an intense theatricality that never fails to thrill.

Last time I was in the west cemetery, I visited some relatively recent graves. George Michael and Lucian Freud are neighbours in death. I wonder: did they know each other in life? That's the thing about old graveyards: they stimulate that part of the brain excited by narrative so that as you walk around, reading the stones, both mind and body are working together.

This is especially true of a visit to Highgate which, for me, begins with a hike up the hill from Archway Tube station. En route I pause for a breather by the 1821 Whittington Stone at the foot of Highgate Hill, marking the spot where Dick Whittington is said to have heard the bells of St Mary-le-Bow prophesying that he would be mayor. Having passed its feline sculpture, those of a whimsical bent might want to conclude their stroll at a statue of a larger cat cousin: Nero, a marble lion who sleeps atop the grave of George Wombwell, the showman who founded England's largest travelling menagerie. It's just another story in London's library of the dead. **H**

// These grand 19th-century necropolises replaced overflowing and pestilent city churchyards //

Peter Ross is an author and journalist. His books include *A Tomb With a View: The Stories & Glories of Graveyards* (Headline, 2020)



For more information, head to highgatecemetery.org



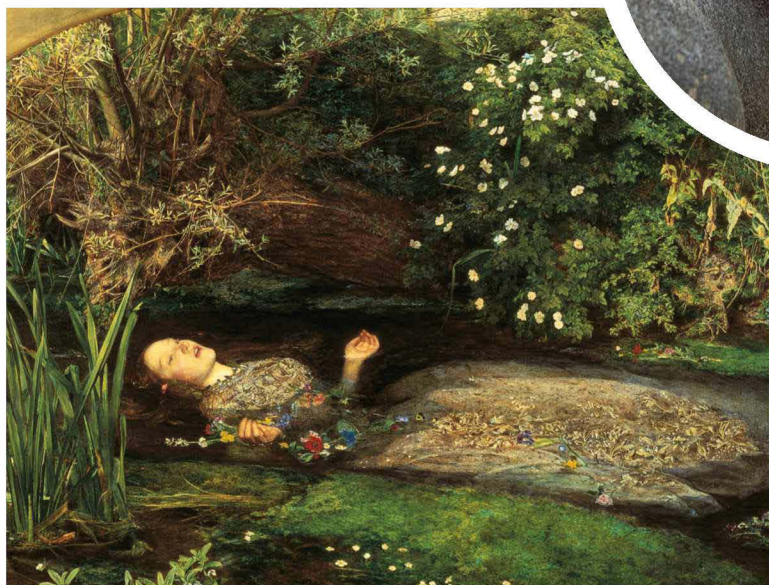
The cemetery's Egyptian Avenue, designed to appeal to wealthy clients, reflected the 'Egyptomania' that gripped 19th-century Britain



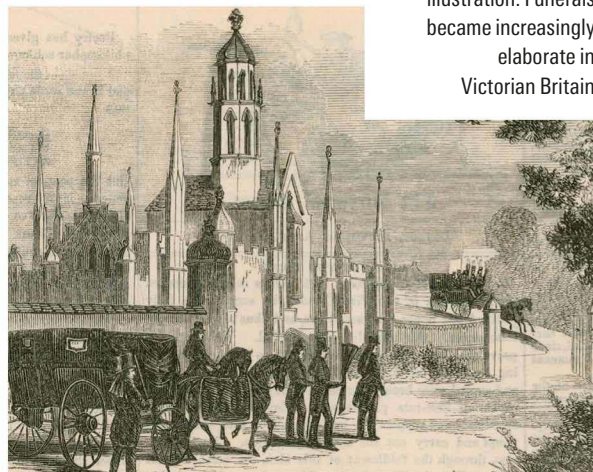
Highgate Cemetery has been a fashionable resting place for London's dead since it opened in 1839. It was the third of the so-called 'Magnificent Seven' cemeteries to be created in the capital



INSET LEFT En route to the cemetery, admire the 1821 memorial to Dick Whittington, to which a statue of his fabled cat was added in 1964
BELOW A cortège arrives at Highgate in an 1844 illustration. Funerals became increasingly elaborate in Victorian Britain



John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851–52). The drowned figure is based on Pre-Raphaelite model, artist and poet Lizzie Siddal, who was buried in Highgate Cemetery in 1862



DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES/LAMY/BRIDGEMAN

Mexico City in five places

The city of Tenochtitlan, created by the Aztecs, is now Mexico's vibrant capital.

AMY FULLER reveals five places to visit for echoes of the past

1 Coyoacán Cortés, Kahlo and communism

A southern suburb of Mexico City, Coyoacán – 'Place of the Coyotes' – was a trade centre on the shore of Lake Texcoco in the Aztec era. Conquistador Hernán Cortés based himself here while Mexico City was being rebuilt (on the ruins of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan) as the capital of New Spain. It boasts some wonderful colonial-era architecture, including the Church of San Juan Bautista, reputedly begun in 1522, shortly after Cortés's forces took the city.

In Coyoacán, you can also visit Casa Azul (Blue House), family home of the artist Frida Kahlo, and the heavily fortified house nearby where Soviet exile Leon Trotsky lived and was assassinated in 1940. Coyoacán is relatively peaceful during the week, but on the weekend it gets crowded with people watching musicians and dancing. There are also all kinds of street food on offer – ice cream, *churros*, *marquesitas* (filled pancakes), *tostadas* (deep-fried tortillas topped with meat, refried beans, lettuce and cheese) and *esquites* (seasoned sweetcorn in a cup).



The Casa Azul is now a museum devoted to the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907–54)



2 Teotihuacán Inspiring the Aztecs

North-east of Mexico City proper stands the ancient Mesoamerican city of Teotihuacán. At its height about 1,500 years ago, this was the largest urban settlement in the Americas – a vast city-state centred on a complex of plazas, palaces, temples and two enormous pyramids. The largest, the Pyramid of the Sun, covers roughly the same area as Egypt's Great Pyramid of Khufu. Among the amazing murals at Teotihuacán is one of a ball game, which is among the oldest sports known and still played in parts of Mexico.

We don't know who lived in Teotihuacán, but evidence shows that it held a dominant position across Mesoamerica, trading with other civilisations such as the Maya. By the seventh century, it was in decline due to internal unrest, and major civic structures were burned. Yet its ruins were still impressive enough to fascinate the Aztecs, who rose to power centuries after the city's fall. The Aztecs venerated Teotihuacán as 'The Place where Men Become Gods' – and that city is still a humbling place to explore.

3 Xochimilco Floating food

After they founded the city of Tenochtitlan around 1325, the Aztecs co-opted an existing agricultural system involving *chinampas*. Often described as 'floating gardens', these were rafts constructed with branches and soil, which become rooted to the lake floor and provided fertile land on which to grow vegetables – effectively creating farms to feed the urban population.

After the Spanish conquest, much of Lake Texcoco was drained but in Xochimilco, now a southern suburb of Mexico City, you can find a network of canals and some 200 *chinampas*. At weekends it has a carnival atmosphere. You can explore the canals on colourful boats called *trajineras*, perhaps being serenaded by mariachi musicians while sipping margaritas and tucking into local food. In late October and early November, around the Day of the Dead, the folk story of La Llorona, 'The Wailing Woman', is performed here to audiences in *trajineras* – spooky and unforgettable.



The vast Pyramid of the Sun, which is believed to have been completed around AD 200



DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES/LAMY

4 National Museum of Anthropology World view

The country's largest and most-visited museum, based in expansive Chapultepec Park, takes visitors on a tour of different regions of Mexico through the ages, from the pre-Hispanic era to the modern day. It would take days to explore fully, but there's one truly unmissable exhibit: the Aztec sun stone.

This monolithic disc of basalt, some 3.6 metres in diameter and weighing around 25 tonnes, is carved with a central face. This might represent the female earth monster Tlaltecuhlti, or Yohualtecuhlti, 'Lord of the Night', a hybrid god of the Earth, darkness and death – surrounded by motifs including symbols indicating the Aztec calendar. Probably commissioned by Moctezuma II (ruled c1502–20), it was likely a *cuauhxicalli* or sacrificial altar in the Templo Mayor (Main Temple) of Tenochtitlan. Buried after the conquest, it was rediscovered in 1790 during urban repairs around the cathedral in Mexico City.



The Aztec sun stone was mounted on a wall of Mexico City Cathedral for nearly 100 years



Trajineras, which were once used to transport goods, crowd the waterway in Xochimilco

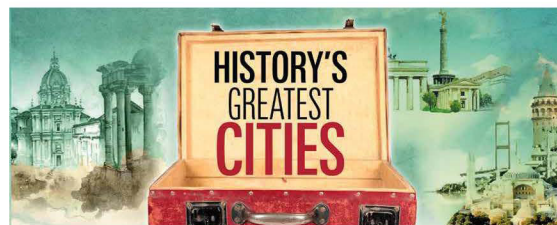


5 El Bazar Sábado Arts and crafts

The Aztecs were, famously, a warrior people who made human sacrifices. But they were also talented artisans who created wonderful ceramics and weavings with sacred significance. Every *calpulli* (small town) had its own market, some of which were huge. Cortés estimated that the biggest market in Tlatelolco, a sister city to Tenochtitlan, was twice the size of the whole Spanish city of Salamanca, drawing 40,000 people on feast days – so it's clear that markets were an important part of life here in the pre-Hispanic era.

You can get a feel for that period and admire Mexican crafts at the Saturday market in Plaza San Jacinto, a stately square surrounded by historic mansions in the south-western suburb of San Ángel, where artisans and artists display their work. **H**

Amy Fuller is senior lecturer in the history of the Americas at Nottingham Trent University. She was speaking to travel writer Paul Bloomfield, the host of our podcast series *History's Greatest Cities*



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PRIZE CROSSWORD

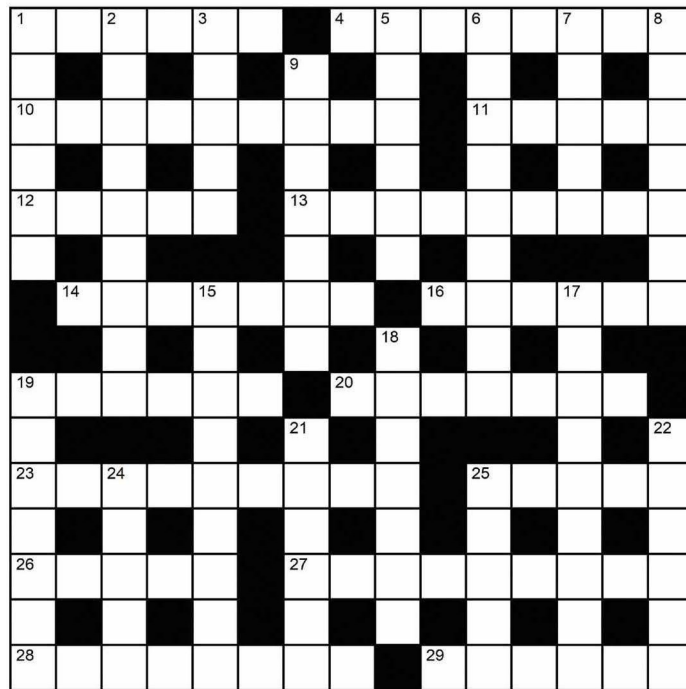
Across

- 1 West German chancellor, a leading figure in the country's post-World War II recovery (6)
 4 An ancient raised area of extensive woodland in south east England (3,5)
 10 Swedish queen whose abdication in 1654 for personal reasons caused widespread shock (9)
 11 City in which Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in 1431 (5)
 12 The ____ Valley (or Harappan) Civilisation, which was the first known culture of the Indian subcontinent (5)
 13 Astronomical instrument dating to ancient times, precursor of the sextant (9)
 14 Region of central Italy whose civilisation, noted for art, was eventually Romanised (7)
 16 Soviet leader much criticised after his death by one-time supporter Khrushchev (6)
 19 John ____, celebrated Victorian art critic, champion of JMW Turner's works (6)
 20 It was made capital of the Western Roman Empire in AD 402 (7)
 23 Young men conscripted to work in coal mines – a scheme introduced by the Minister of Labour in 1943 (5,4)
 25 Peninsula occupied for 15 years by Israel, after the Six-Day War of 1967 (5)
 26 Charles ____, half of a famous car manufacturing partnership (5)
 27 Livia Drusilla, wife of the emperor Augustus, is portrayed as such a female having a powerful role in state affairs (9)
 28 11th-century archbishop of Canterbury, credited with discovering the 'ontological argument' for God's existence (2,6)
 29 Imperialist politician, a dominant figure in late 19th-century southern Africa, now highly controversial (6)

Down

- 1 Renowned Greek mathematician and teacher of geometry who flourished around 300 BC (6)
 2 Fifth-century BC Greek writer on the Greco-Persian wars, said to be the first great narrative historian (9)
 3 See 6 down
 5 The ____ tax, based on a household's fireplaces, applied in England and Wales from 1662 to 1689 (6)
 6/3 down A 30-year series of English dynastic conflicts in the 15th century (4,2,3,5)
 7 Caribbean island, settled by Arawak Indians, taken by the

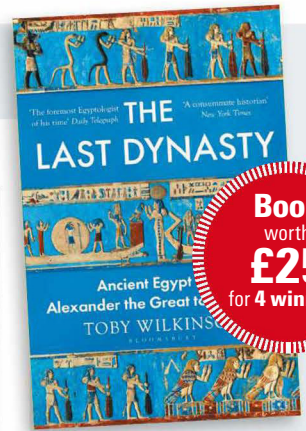
Which Swedish queen abdicated in 1654? (10 across)



What was the name of a 17th-century English tax on a home's fireplaces? (5 down)

- Dutch in 1636, gained autonomy in 1886 (5)
 8 St Andrew's Castle, Fife, has an infamous bottle ____ form of oubliette (7)
 9 Its sinking led to the formation of the International Ice Patrol in 1914 (7)
 15 Loyalist white Southerners who opposed secession at the time of the American Civil War (9)
 17 It was awarded the official title 'Hero City of the Soviet Union' in 1965 (9)
 18 Mary ____, the US painter who became part of the Impressionists' circle in Paris (7)
 19 Alice ____, 'biological anthropologist', presenter of BBC's *Digging for Britain* (7)
 21 Famous Second World War adversary of General Montgomery (6)
 22 Traditional contributions to the church made from people's incomes (6)
 24 'Pancho', Mexican revolutionary leader, assassinated in 1923 (5)
 25 Singer Bessie ____, 'Empress of the Blues' (5)

Compiled by Eddie James



Book worth £25 for 4 winners

The Last Dynasty: Ancient Egypt from Alexander the Great to Cleopatra By Toby Wilkinson

After Alexander the Great's conquest, Egyptian and Greek culture was fused under the Ptolemies. This book explores that family's ruthless brilliance, with royal intrigue vividly revealed through archaeology and compelling storytelling.

HOW TO ENTER

- Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, February 2025 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to **February2025@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on 19 February 2025.
- Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the April 2025 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy>
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Solution to our December 2024 crossword:

Across 9 Lamarr 11 Speer 12 Oubliette 13 Assizes 15 Absalon 16 Margaret Tudor 22 Althing 24 Trieste 26 Samarkand 27 Arles 28 O'Brien 29 Bernicia
Down 1 Borstal 2 Lear 3 Sepoys 4 Tamils 5 Martello 6 Orleans 8 Chess 10 Oblast 14 Zog 17 Altamira 18 Raglan 19 UDI 20 Sassoon 21 Persian 23 Israel 24 Tedder 25 Salic 27/7 Anne of Cleves
Four winners of History of Cities in Maps: Richard Woodroffe, Westbury; Jeremy Smith, Buxton; Cynthia Brown, Leicester; Andrew Wilson, Hyde

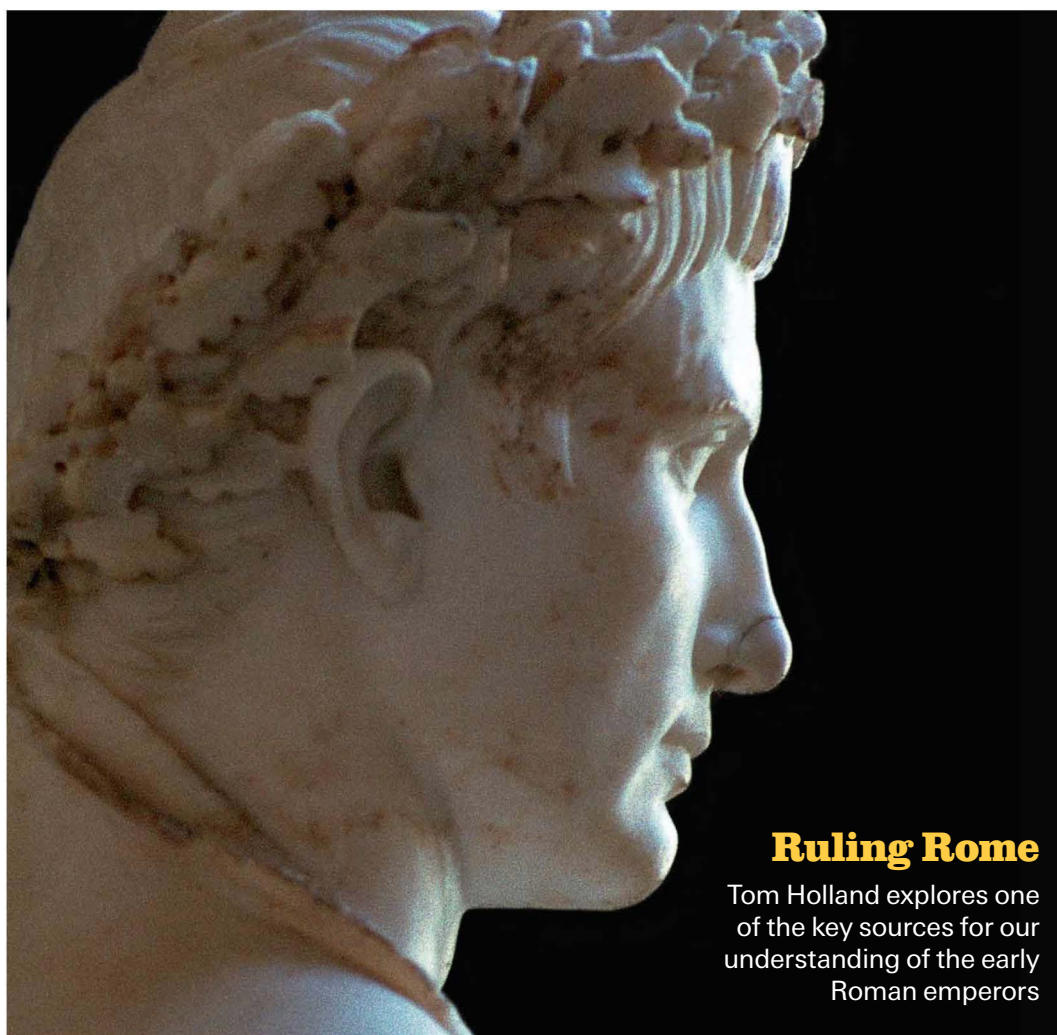
Solution to our Christmas 2024 crossword:

Across 9 Pound 10 Achaean 11 Borman 13 Nuremberg 14 Louisiana 15 Cuzco 17 Quesnay 18 Ypres 20 Roanoke 21 ANC 22 Lettice 25 Phoenicia 27 Jitterbug 28 Nigeria 29 Han 30 Boer War 31 Sharp 33 Tommies 34 Shaka 36 Proconsul 38 Skara Brae 40 Hattin 41 Mosaic 42 Maori
Down 1 Lucrezia Borgia 2 Adam 3 Palenque 4 Che Guevara 5 Hellenic 6 Fossey 7 Emma 8 Annals 9 Punic 12 July Plot 16 O'Connor 19 Rainbow Warrior 20 Ripon 23 Theseus 24 Elgar 26 Chartism 27 Jenkins ear 29 Hamilton 30 Bismarck 31 Sappho 32 Provos 35 Alesia 37 Otto 39 Arms
The winner of our Christmas crossword – and a festive bundle of history books: E Cadwallader, Scunthorpe

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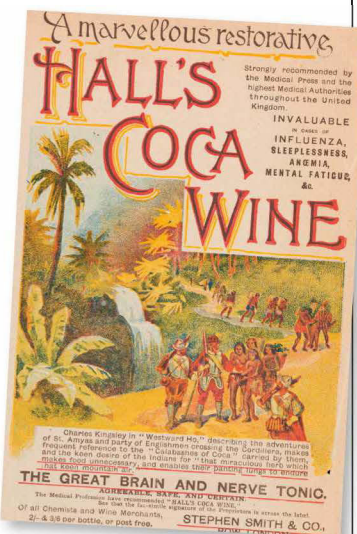




Ruling Rome

Tom Holland explores one of the key sources for our understanding of the early Roman emperors

**March issue on sale
20 February 2025**



Cocaine and the Victorians

Douglas Small on how this dangerous drug was used for all manner of purposes in 19th-century Britain



Morning in America

Phil Tinline reflects on the USA in 1985 – an age of sunny optimism, with dark clouds forming above

Radio times

Beaty Rubens reveals how early broadcasting shaped British society in the 1920s and 30s

The forgotten kingdom

Max Adams argues that Anglo-Saxon Mercia was central to the rise of England



Russia's lost empress

Helen Rappaport introduces a German princess who escaped Romanov cruelty

MY HISTORY HERO

Scientist *Mary Archer* chooses

Marie-Anne Paulze Lavoisier

1758–1836



Dame Mary Archer is a scientist who was formerly a chemistry lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, and chair of the trustees of the Science Museum Group. She is currently chancellor of the University of Buckingham



Marie-Anne and Antoine Lavoisier, painted in 1788 by Jacques-Louis David.

"I admire her persistence, courage and intellectual accomplishment," says Mary Archer

IN PROFILE

Marie-Anne Paulze Lavoisier, later Countess Rumford, was a French chemist, linguist, translator and noblewoman who helped bring the pioneering work of her husband, chemist Antoine Lavoisier, to the attention of a wider international audience. She later married Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, but retained her first husband's last name. She died at home in Paris, aged 78.

/// Marie-Anne's father, who was also a tax collector, was guillotined on the same day as her husband – just imagine that! ///

When did you first hear about Lavoisier?

While I studied chemistry at Oxford. Marie-Anne and Antoine Lavoisier played a major part in overthrowing the century-old phlogiston theory of heat, and helped usher in the 'new chemistry' revolution. Antoine, assisted by Marie-Anne, discovered the role that oxygen plays in both the oxidation of metals and combustion.

What kind of woman was she?

Marie-Anne was a highly accomplished figure who spoke several languages, and translated foreign works into French for her husband, whom she married when she was only 13. She was also a skilled 'draughtsman', trained by the artist Jacques-Louis David – who, incidentally, painted a wonderful portrait of the couple, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York – and engraved the most beautiful illustrations for Antoine's chemistry books. She was also a very determined woman.

What made her a hero?

First, the role she played in helping to popularise the 'new chemistry'. She became interested in the subject when translating works from English and German into French, and became sufficiently knowledgeable about the subject to assist Antoine in his experiments, which she wrote up in lab notebooks.

But it's her courage that I most admire. Antoine, who worked as a tax collector, fell foul of the French revolutionary authorities and was guillotined in 1794, aged just 50. She fought hard for his release during his imprisonment; after his execution she was bankrupted, and everything in their chemical laboratory – notebooks included – was confiscated. She fought tooth and nail to get those items back, and they are now in an archive at Cornell University. Some of his instrumentation was also recovered and is on display in the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris.

What was Marie-Anne's finest hour?

That fight for her husband in the most tempestuous times during the French Revolution, and retrieving her lab notebooks, her husband's chemical apparatus and his memory and achievements for the scientific world. Incidentally, Marie-Anne's father, who was also a tax collector, was guillotined on the same day as her husband. Just imagine that!

Can you see any parallels between her life and your own?

I admire her qualities that I would like to think I also have: persistence, courage and intellectual accomplishment.

What would you ask Marie-Anne if you could meet her?

I'd ask what her role was in the state-of-the-art chemistry laboratory that Antoine built – in the Arsenal in Paris, of all places. **H**

Mary Archer was talking to York Membery

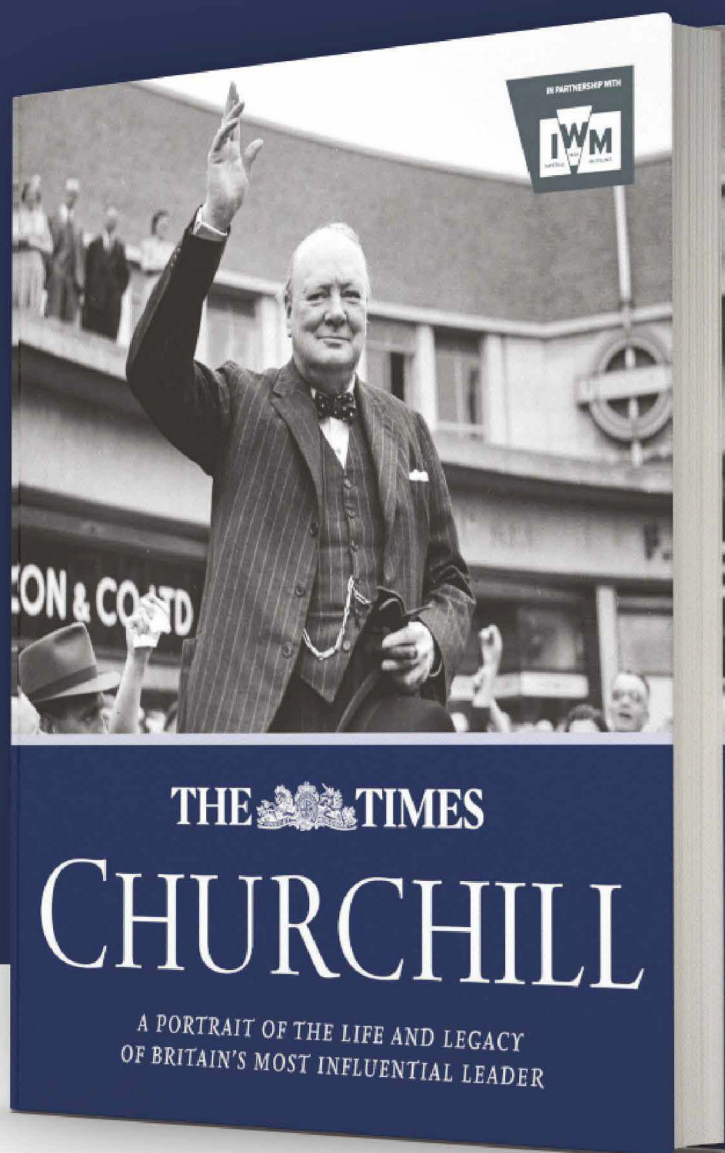


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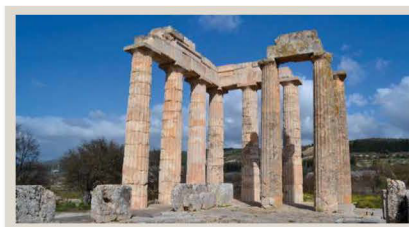
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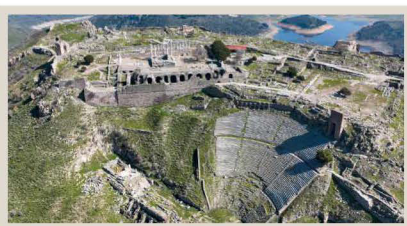
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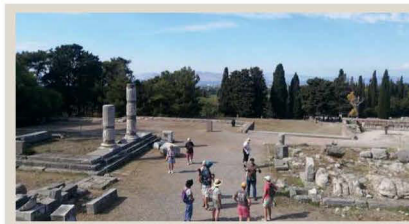
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